

# Teacher Questioning Practices and Multidimensional Student Engagement in an Indonesian Primary EFL Classroom

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## Abstract

Teachers' questioning plays a pivotal role in shaping classroom interaction and student engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, particularly in primary classrooms where learners have limited English exposure and content knowledge. In many Indonesian EFL classrooms, including those in Lampung, instructional interaction remains largely teacher-dominated, restricting students' opportunities to participate actively in meaning-making. Responding to this issue, this qualitative case study investigates the types of questioning strategies employed by a primary EFL teacher, how these strategies are enacted in classroom interaction to stimulate student engagement, and the challenges encountered in implementing them with young learners. The participants consisted of one English teacher and eighteen third-grade students at a primary school in Lampung, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal four dominant types of teacher questions—factual, probing, divergent, and higher-order—each serving distinct interactional functions. Factual questions were predominantly used to check understanding and manage lesson flow, while probing questions supported elaboration and reasoning. Divergent questions encouraged idea generation and personal connections, and higher-order questions promoted critical thinking, evaluation, and dialogic interaction. These questioning practices were found to stimulate students' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement to varying degrees. Interview data further indicate that the teacher intentionally used questioning to monitor comprehension, activate prior knowledge, scaffold participation, and foster student engagement. However, challenges emerged related to students' limited content knowledge and the teacher's difficulty in responding to students' divergent questions.

**Keywords:** Questioning strategy, EFL, young learner, student engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

In Indonesian EFL classrooms, interaction is frequently characterized by teacher-dominated discourse, which limits students' opportunities to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and participate actively in learning (Suryati, 2015; Nasir et al., 2019; Meida & Fadhly, 2018; Rido, 2017). Such teacher-centred interactional patterns often restrict students' engagement and communicative participation, as teachers retain primary control over classroom talk, positioning learners mainly as passive recipients rather than active contributors to discussion (Indiriani et al., 2016; Putri et al., 2024). Within this context, there is a clear need for classroom practices that can redistribute interactional space and actively involve students in meaning-making. One such practice is teacher questioning, which functions as a crucial pedagogical and interactional resource for reshaping classroom discourse. When questions are designed and enacted strategically, they can move classroom interaction beyond routine recitation toward more dialogic forms of talk by encouraging students to elaborate responses, justify reasoning, and build on their peers' ideas (Rido, 2017; Yang, 2021; Willemsen et al., 2018; Vrikki et al., 2019). Through this dialogic use of questioning, students are more likely to participate behaviorally, engage in deeper cognitive processing, and develop positive emotional involvement in learning. These dimensions of engagement become particularly salient when classroom interaction provides space for elaboration, reflection, and cognitive activation, rather than limiting students to brief or evaluative responses (Fredricks et al., 2016; Wong & Liem, 2022; Böheim et al., 2021).

Building on this view, teacher questioning can be understood not simply as a technique for eliciting answers, but as one of the most powerful interactional resources in classroom discourse, particularly in EFL contexts where opportunities for spontaneous language use are inherently limited (Astrid et al., 2019; Daar & Ndorang, 2020; Rido, 2017). Rather than functioning merely to check comprehension, teacher questions actively shape the interactional space in which learning occurs by regulating who speaks, when participation takes place, and how contributions are developed during classroom interaction (Duran & Jacknick, 2020; Vrikki & Evagorou, 2023; Vrikki et al., 2019). Through questioning, teachers can create opportunities for students to articulate ideas, justify reasoning, and negotiate meaning, or constrain interaction by eliciting brief and evaluative responses that limit student participation (van Balen et al., 2022; Duran & Jacknick, 2020). In this sense, questioning functions as an interactional mechanism that organizes classroom talk and mediates students' access to learning opportunities. Its impact, therefore, depends not only on the formal type of questions posed but also on how questions are enacted through interactional practices such as contingent follow-up, turn extension, and responsiveness to student contributions (Howe et al., 2019; Vrikki & Evagorou, 2023).

Previous studies have consistently highlighted teacher questioning as a central feature of interaction in EFL classrooms and a potential driver of student engagement. Research in Indonesian EFL contexts shows that teachers employ a range of questioning strategies, including convergent, divergent, procedural, probing, prompting, and redirection questions, to manage classroom interaction and support learning (Astrid et al., 2019; Nuryanti et al., 2024; Nashruddin & Ningtyas, 2020). Across these studies, low-level or convergent questions tend to dominate classroom discourse, often serving to check comprehension, recall prior knowledge, and maintain lesson flow. While higher-order or divergent questions are acknowledged for their potential to stimulate critical thinking and

deeper engagement, they are used less frequently and inconsistently. Several studies also emphasize that questioning strategies such as prompting, probing, wait-time, repetition, and rephrasing can encourage student participation and support engagement, particularly when questions are adapted to students' linguistic ability and classroom context ([Rahayu & Suharti, 2023](#); [Kholisoh & Bharati, 2021](#)). Importantly, findings suggest that students generally perceive critical or higher-level questions positively, viewing them as motivating rather than threatening, even when they find them challenging.

Although previous studies have examined teacher questioning strategies in EFL classrooms, much of the existing literature has focused primarily on identifying question types and describing teachers' stated reasons for using particular strategies. Comparatively little attention has been paid to how these questioning strategies are enacted in real-time classroom interaction and how they function to stimulate different dimensions of student engagement during learning activities. In addition, while challenges related to the use of questioning strategies have been acknowledged, they are often discussed broadly, without close examination of the interactional and contextual constraints teachers face in specific classroom settings. To address these gaps, the present study investigates (1) the types and distribution of questioning strategies employed by the teacher, (2) how these questions are enacted in classroom interaction to stimulate students' engagement, and (3) the challenges reported in implementing questioning strategies in an EFL classroom.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to examine a primary EFL teacher's questioning strategies and their interactional functions in promoting students' engagement. A case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth analysis of naturally occurring classroom interaction and the contextual conditions that shape participation, allowing questioning to be examined as situated practice rather than as decontextualized technique ([Rashid et al., 2019](#); [Chowdhury & Shil, 2021](#); [Quintão et al., 2020](#)). The case was bounded to one primary English teacher and one intact class of eighteen third-grade students in a private primary school, which is consistent with qualitative case study logic that prioritizes depth of understanding within a clearly delimited setting and supports analytic insight even with small, information-rich samples ([Tomaszewski et al., 2020](#); [Young & Casey, 2019](#)). The teacher was purposively selected based on professional qualification and teaching experience to maximize the likelihood of information-rich classroom talk and to ensure that the focal case aligned with the study's phenomenon of interest ([Nakkeeran, 2016](#)). Finally, documenting the classroom size, curriculum requirements, and language policy was treated as an essential part of case specification and interpretive rigor, because case study findings are understood through systematic attention to the setting and its constraints rather than through statistical generalization ([Quintão et al., 2020](#); [Rashid et al., 2019](#)).

Three primary data collection techniques were employed, namely observation, interview, and document analysis, to enable triangulation across data sources and strengthen the credibility of the case description and interpretation. Indirect video-based observation was conducted through the systematic analysis of a recorded lesson of the primary English teacher's classroom interaction. This approach allowed repeated viewing and careful examination of naturally occurring classroom talk, supporting detailed coding

and interpretation of questioning practices and interactional moves (Molbæk & Kristensen, 2020; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). An observation guide was used to focus analytic attention on the types of teacher questions and patterns of student participation during the descriptive text lesson, ensuring consistency in identifying questioning episodes across the recording. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted to explore the teacher's intentions underlying specific questioning strategies and the challenges encountered in enacting them. Interview prompts were closely aligned with observed classroom events to enhance contextual depth and analytic coherence (Döringer, 2020; Vogl et al., 2019). In addition, document analysis was used to corroborate and contextualize findings from observations and interviews by examining relevant instructional artefacts, including lesson plans, teaching materials, and learning tasks, thereby providing further qualitative validation and strengthening analytic triangulation (Morgan, 2018; Morgan, 2022; Sankofa, 2023).

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, implemented through a recursive six-phase procedure: familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This analytic process followed contemporary guidance on rigorous qualitative analysis and emphasized reflexivity and iterative engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022; Naeem et al., 2023). Following in-depth familiarization with the classroom observation and interview datasets, all teacher questions were systematically coded into four analytically meaningful categories: probing questions, factual/convergent questions, divergent/open questions, and higher-order questions. This categorization was informed by prior questioning research that distinguishes questions by openness, cognitive demand, and interactional follow-up functions, enabling a nuanced analysis of how different questioning practices operate within classroom interaction.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study examined teacher questioning practices in an EFL classroom, with a particular focus on the types of questions employed during instruction. The findings indicate that the teacher predominantly used four types of questions, namely factual, probing, divergent, and higher-order questions. The following sections present a detailed account of how these questioning practices were enacted in classroom interaction, drawing on evidence from the observation data.

**Table 1.** Distribution of teacher question types across three meetings

No.	Question Type	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Total	Percentage
1	Factual	12	14	8	34	50.75%
2	Probing	4	5	5	14	20.90%
3	Divergent	4	1	3	8	11.94%
4	Higher-Order	5	2	4	11	16.42%

Table 1 presents the distribution of teacher question types across three classroom meetings. A total of 67 questions were identified, with factual questions accounting for the most significant proportion at 50.75 percent. This indicates that factual questions were the dominant questioning strategy used across the observed lessons, reflecting the teacher's emphasis on checking students' basic understanding and recall of lesson content. Probing

questions constituted 20.90 percent of the total and were used consistently across the three meetings, suggesting their role in encouraging clarification and brief elaboration of student responses. Higher-order questions accounted for 16.42 percent of the questions and appeared intermittently across sessions, indicating selective use to promote deeper thinking and evaluation. Divergent questions were the least frequent, at 11.94 percent, suggesting that opportunities for open-ended or multiple-response questions occurred less often during classroom interaction.

### ***Factual Questions***

Factual questions were the most frequently used type, accounting for 50.75 percent of the total questions identified across the three meetings. These questions were primarily used to verify students' recall and basic knowledge related to the lesson content. During classroom interaction, factual questions typically elicited short, accurate responses and were often followed by immediate teacher confirmation. For instance, when the teacher asked, *"What is the largest ocean in the world?"*, a student responded, *"Pacific Ocean,"* while raising their hand, and the teacher affirmed the answer by saying, *"Good! Yes, the Pacific Ocean is the largest."* Similar patterns were observed when students were asked to identify oceans associated with specific geographical features or national boundaries, with students responding attentively and taking turns. In terms of student engagement, factual questions were most closely associated with behavioral and cognitive dimensions. Behaviorally, students demonstrated engagement by raising their hands, listening attentively, following instructions, and participating in turn-taking during question-and-answer sequences. Cognitively, engagement was evident in students' ability to recall and reproduce factual information accurately. Emotional engagement was less pronounced; however, brief moments of confidence and satisfaction emerged when students provided correct answers and received positive feedback from the teacher. These patterns indicate that factual questions play an important role in sustaining classroom order and participation, even though they do not inherently promote extended reasoning or deeper conceptual exploration.

The teacher's interview further clarifies the pedagogical intention behind the frequent use of factual questions. The teacher explained, *"When I ask questions that need a correct answer, the purpose is first to train students to stay focused and help them feel noticed and involved in the lesson. Second, questioning helps me assess students' prior knowledge, so I can align my teaching accordingly. Third, it allows me to confirm whether they truly understand the material or if they need to explore the topic more deeply."* This explanation aligns closely with observed classroom practices, in which factual questions served as a tool for monitoring understanding, activating prior knowledge, and maintaining students' attention. The frequent use of factual questions supported the teacher's instructional goals by fostering an attentive, structured classroom environment. While these questions did not encourage deeper thinking on their own, they served a strategic function by establishing a shared base of understanding and fostering students' confidence in participation. In this way, factual questions formed a necessary foundation upon which more probing, divergent, and higher-order questioning could later build to support richer interaction and engagement.



### **Probing Questions**

Probing questions accounted for 20.90 percent of the total questions and were used to encourage students to explain, clarify, or extend their initial responses. These questions typically followed factual answers and were designed to move students beyond simple recall toward more elaborated explanations. For example, when the teacher asked, *“Why is the Pacific Ocean called the Ring of Fire?”*, one student responded briefly, *“Because of volcanoes.”* At the same time, another provided a more extended explanation, *“Many volcanoes and earthquakes happen around its edges.”* Similar probing sequences were observed when students were asked to explain why certain fish live in deep oceans or why oceans need to be protected. In these exchanges, the teacher consistently followed up students’ initial answers with further prompts such as *“How does this help them survive?”* or *“Can you justify why protection matters for humans?”*, encouraging students to elaborate on their thinking. In terms of engagement, probing questions were strongly associated with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Cognitively, students demonstrated engagement by providing reasons, explanations, and cause-and-effect relationships, rather than isolated facts. Their responses showed an ability to connect prior knowledge with new information and to articulate ideas in more complete forms. Emotionally, students often displayed enthusiasm, curiosity, and concern, particularly when discussing real-world issues such as environmental protection. Behaviorally, probing questions prompted longer turns, spontaneous responses, and more active participation, indicating a deeper level of involvement in classroom interaction.

The teacher’s interview provides further insight into the purposeful use of probing questions. The teacher noted, *“The students generally respond with a lot of excitement, especially at the primary level. Those eager to speak English tend to be more curious and engaged in the lesson, particularly when the topic is new to them. Sometimes, even though I set the rule that they need to raise their hand before answering, they get so excited that they forget and respond immediately. Their enthusiasm is a very positive sign.”* This reflection aligns closely with the observed classroom interaction, in which probing questions elicited immediate, animated responses. Students’ willingness to expand their answers, such as explaining survival strategies of deep-sea fish or the importance of oceans for human life, reflects strong cognitive engagement driven by curiosity. The deliberate use of probing questions created an interactional space that supported deeper thinking and sustained participation. By encouraging students to explain and justify their ideas, probing questions fostered a learning environment in which students were cognitively challenged, emotionally engaged, and behaviorally active. These interactional patterns suggest that probing questions play a crucial scaffolding role, preparing students for more open-ended and analytical discussions in subsequent classroom interaction.

### **Divergent Questions**

Divergent questions accounted for 11.94 percent of the total questions and invited multiple perspectives and open-ended responses from students. These questions encouraged idea generation and collective participation, allowing students to share different viewpoints and co-construct meaning during classroom interaction. For example, when the teacher asked, *“What can we do to reduce ocean pollution?”*, students offered varied responses such as *“Stop using plastic,”* *“Plant mangroves,”* and *“Teach friends not to litter,”*

with students taking turns to contribute ideas. Similarly, imaginative divergent questions, such as *"If you were a marine animal, which one would you be?"*, prompted students to express personal preferences and creative reasoning, with responses including *"Dolphin, smart and friendly," "Turtle, long life,"* and *"Shark, strong."* These divergent questioning sequences created opportunities for students to connect lesson content with their own experiences and perspectives. When discussing environmental responsibility, students proposed concrete actions such as *"Collect trash every weekend"* and extended peers' ideas by adding, *"After we collect trash every weekend, we use less plastic."* The teacher's follow-up prompt, *"Great ideas! Can anyone think of something else?"*, further encouraged continued participation and collective idea building. These interactional patterns show how divergent questions can sustain dialogue and invite students to build on one another's contributions rather than responding in isolation.

From an engagement perspective, divergent questions activated multiple dimensions simultaneously. Cognitively, students were required to reflect on prior knowledge, imagine alternative possibilities, and generate original ideas. Emotionally, students appeared more invested when their personal experiences and viewpoints were valued, as indicated by visible interest, smiles, and expressions of responsibility toward environmental issues. Behaviorally, engagement was evident in active participation, turn-taking, and responsiveness to peers' contributions, suggesting that students were involved not only individually but also socially in the learning process. The teacher's interview further clarifies the intention behind the use of divergent questions. The teacher explained, *"I chose these types of questions to find out if they have ever experienced something similar in their daily lives. This helps make the lesson more relatable to them, so they can easily connect with the material."* This explanation aligns with classroom observations, where divergent questions consistently linked abstract topics to students' everyday experiences, making learning more meaningful and accessible.

### **Higher-Order Questions**

Higher-order questions accounted for 16.42 percent of the total questions and were used to promote students' critical thinking, analysis, evaluation, and problem solving. These questions required students to move beyond factual recall and engage in reasoning processes such as predicting consequences, comparing alternatives, and justifying opinions. For example, when the teacher asked, *"What might happen if plastic keeps increasing in oceans?"*, students responded with analytically oriented answers such as *"Fish die," "Coral reefs are damaged,"* and *"Humans get less seafood."* Although these responses were brief, they demonstrated students' ability to identify cause-and-effect relationships and anticipate broader consequences, indicating emerging analytical thinking.

Higher-order questioning also encouraged evaluative discussion. When the teacher posed the question, *"Which solution is better to protect oceans, laws, or campaigns?"*, students provided reasoned arguments to support their positions. One student stated, *"Laws are better. Laws are strict, so people have to follow them,"* and further explained, *"If they break the rules, they can get punished. This will make people more careful about polluting the ocean."* Another student offered an alternative perspective, saying, *"For me, campaigns are better. Campaigns help people learn about ocean pollution. When people understand the effects, they will change their behavior."* These exchanges show how higher-order questions invited

comparison, justification, and the articulation of contrasting viewpoints, marking a shift from short responses to more dialogic and reasoned interaction.

In terms of engagement, higher-order questions activated all three dimensions simultaneously. Cognitively, students demonstrated engagement by analyzing problems, evaluating solutions, and supporting their ideas with reasons. Emotionally, students expressed concern, empathy, and a sense of responsibility, particularly when discussing the environmental consequences of human actions. Behaviorally, engagement was evident in longer turns, extended explanations, and sustained interaction between students and the teacher. The teacher's feedback further supported this engagement by affirming students' ideas and encouraging elaboration, as reflected in comments such as *"That is a good point. You explained the idea clearly,"* and *"Nice explanation. You gave a reason and explained the impact."* Such feedback reinforced students' confidence and encouraged deeper participation. The teacher's interview confirms the intentional use of higher-order questioning. The teacher explained, *"In the middle of the lesson, I ask more knowledge-based or exploratory questions. For example, during a discussion, I might say, 'What if this happened?' or ask, 'What do you think about oceans?' Questions that challenge their thinking."* This reflection aligns closely with the observed classroom practices, where exploratory and evaluative questions were deliberately used to challenge students' thinking and extend discussion.

### ***Teachers' Intentions in Questioning Strategies***

Interview data indicate that the teacher deliberately employs questioning strategies not merely as a means of checking comprehension, but as a central pedagogical tool for scaffolding students' engagement across behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. The teacher emphasized that questioning is intentionally used to identify students' difficulties and to guide instructional decisions during the lesson. As the teacher explained, *"I always ask them about the difficult words, phrases, sentences, or even topics that they find confusing"* (lines 75–76). Similarly, the teacher noted, *"After reading the text, I ask the students about the text and then ask whether they really understand it or not"* (line 77). These statements suggest that questioning serves an important diagnostic function, enabling the teacher to assess students' prior knowledge and comprehension before advancing to more complex content. Through such questioning, students are encouraged to reflect on their understanding, clarify confusion, and gradually construct meaning, thereby supporting cognitive engagement.

Beyond comprehension monitoring, the teacher also described using follow-up questions to connect lesson content with students' prior experiences and everyday knowledge. The teacher stated, *"I usually ask follow-up questions to understand more about their prior knowledge"* (line 81), and further explained, *"Sometimes I need to ask again in a different way so I can see what they already know from their own experiences"* (lines 82–83). This intention was evident in classroom interaction, where students raised their hands, shared personal experiences, and related lesson topics to familiar situations. Such moments demonstrate behavioral engagement through active participation and emotional engagement through interest and relevance. By responding to students' initial answers with additional prompts, the teacher sought to deepen understanding and sustain interaction rather than accepting brief responses at face value.



The teacher also highlighted the role of questioning in supporting a student-centered learning environment. Reflecting on classroom practice, the teacher explained, *"I ask students to work in groups and discuss. After that, they share the results of their discussion with the class and ask questions to each other. In this way, students take an active role in learning, and I act more as a facilitator"* (lines 39–42). The teacher further added, *"I try to prioritize students' opinions and encourage them to take responsibility for their learning"* (lines 43–44). These statements illustrate an intentional shift from teacher-dominated discourse toward dialogic interaction, where questioning is used to strengthen social dialogue, encourage peer interaction, and promote a sense of ownership over learning. Through this facilitative role, questioning becomes a means of fostering engagement not only at the individual level but also at the social level of classroom interaction.

However, the interview data also reveal an important tension in the implementation of questioning strategies. While the teacher stated that *"most students understand English,"* they also acknowledged that students often lack sufficient content-related prior knowledge, particularly when dealing with topics such as oceans and environmental issues. As the teacher explained, *"Sometimes the problem is not the language, but they do not really understand the content because they have never experienced it in real life"* (lines 68–70). This disparity indicates that students' language proficiency does not always align with their conceptual understanding, which can limit the effectiveness of open-ended or higher-level questions. In such cases, students may struggle to elaborate responses or engage deeply, despite being linguistically capable.

To address this challenge, the teacher emphasized the need for gradual scaffolding through questioning. The teacher noted, *"I need to start from simple questions first, explain the concept, and then slowly move to more difficult questions"* (lines 84–85). This approach reflects an awareness that questioning strategies must be adjusted to accommodate students' varying levels of background knowledge in order to stimulate engagement across behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. Activating prior experiences, clarifying concepts in context, and sequencing questions from simple to complex were viewed as essential steps to reduce cognitive overload and support meaningful participation.

Despite these deliberate intentions, the teacher also recognized limitations in evaluating the impact of questioning strategies on student engagement. The observational data did not systematically capture indicators such as the length of students' responses, frequency of voluntary participation, or patterns of peer-to-peer interaction over time. Consequently, while the teacher perceived questioning as effective in stimulating engagement, further analysis focusing on interactional uptake would be needed to confirm this impact. Examining how students respond to follow-up questions, whether their contributions become longer or more complex, and how peer interaction develops could provide stronger empirical evidence of how questioning strategies function to promote multidimensional engagement in classroom practice.

### **Questioning Hurdles**

Interview data indicate that students' limited prior knowledge of lesson content constitutes a significant obstacle to effective questioning. Although many students were perceived to have adequate linguistic ability in English, the teacher emphasized that conceptual understanding often remained weak. As the teacher explained, *"When they do not*

*have the experience, or they do not know what it means in real life, they cannot relate the discussion to their understanding*" (lines 67–72). This suggests that the difficulty lies not primarily in language use but in students' lack of conceptual schemas related to the topic, such as knowledge of marine zones and ocean ecosystems. As a result, when probing or divergent questions were posed, students frequently provided superficial answers or struggled to justify their ideas. This limited uptake constrained cognitive engagement and reduced opportunities for extended interaction.

The teacher further reflected on this issue by noting, *"Sometimes they can answer in English, but they do not really understand the idea behind the question"* (lines 73–74). This mismatch between linguistic competence and content knowledge made it challenging for students to engage deeply with higher-level questions, reinforcing the importance of activating and building background knowledge before expecting elaborated responses. Consequently, students' prior knowledge emerged as a pivotal factor influencing the effectiveness of questioning strategies and the quality of classroom interaction.

A second significant challenge concerned responding to students' divergent questions. While the teacher was able to generate divergent questions, responding to students' unexpected or creative inquiries proved more demanding. The teacher explained, *"The difficulty is not in creating divergent questions, but in responding to the students' divergent questions. I can scaffold questions related to the ocean text, but sometimes misconceptions appear because both the students and I may not have enough content knowledge"* (lines 87–92). When students' questions were based on incomplete or inaccurate understandings, the teacher found it difficult to sustain productive dialogue, particularly when the content extended beyond the planned lesson scope. In such situations, classroom interaction became less fluid, which could reduce verbal participation, limit behavioral engagement, and lead to frustration or emotional disengagement among students.

The teacher also acknowledged, *"If I am not fully prepared for their questions, it becomes harder to guide the discussion in a meaningful way"* (lines 93–94). This highlights how teachers' own content knowledge plays a critical role in managing open-ended dialogue and maintaining student engagement. When responses to divergent questions were unclear or delayed, opportunities for deeper discussion diminished, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between teacher preparedness and student engagement.

From a pedagogical perspective, these challenges point to the need for more intensive and deliberate scaffolding strategies. Before introducing exploratory or divergent questions, teachers need to establish sufficient background knowledge through schema activation activities, such as discussing familiar experiences or providing contextual explanations. The teacher noted, *"I need to explain the concept first and connect it to their daily life before asking deeper questions"* (lines 84–85). Such preparation helps ensure that students have a shared foundation for participating in more complex dialogue. In addition, strengthening teachers' content knowledge and anticipating possible student questions may enhance their ability to respond effectively to divergent inquiries, thereby sustaining meaningful interaction.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the types and distribution of teacher questioning strategies, how these strategies were enacted in classroom interaction to stimulate student engagement, and the challenges encountered in implementing them in a primary EFL classroom. The findings

indicate that teacher questioning in this context was not a uniform or mechanical practice but a layered, purposeful interactional process shaped by instructional goals, student readiness, and classroom realities (Ismalinda et al., 2023). The predominance of factual questions suggests that the teacher relied heavily on recall-based questioning to establish shared understanding, manage lesson flow, and sustain participation among young learners. In primary EFL classrooms where students often possess uneven content knowledge, such reliance can be understood as pedagogically strategic rather than restrictive, as factual questions help secure a common conceptual ground before more cognitively demanding interaction occurs (Astrid et al., 2019; Nashruddin & Ningtyas, 2020; Nuryanti et al., 2024).

At the same time, the presence of probing, divergent, and higher-order questions demonstrates that questioning practices were not confined to low-level recall. Instead, the teacher used different question types to serve distinct interactional purposes (Fata et al., 2022). Probing questions played a crucial role in extending students' responses and encouraging explanation, thereby supporting a transition from surface understanding to deeper reasoning. This finding aligns with research showing that follow-up and probing moves are central to sustaining meaningful classroom interaction and promoting cognitive engagement (Suartini et al., 2020; Omari, 2018; Lestari, 2022). Divergent questions further expanded the interactional space by inviting multiple perspectives and linking lesson content to students' lived experiences. Through these questions, students were encouraged to share ideas, respond to peers, and co-construct meaning, reflecting dialogic practices that support social participation and collaborative learning (Vrikki et al., 2018; Willemsen et al., 2018). Higher-order questions most clearly stimulated critical thinking and evaluative reasoning, prompting students to analyze consequences, compare alternatives, and articulate reasoned positions. When enacted with appropriate follow-up, these questions shifted classroom interaction toward a more dialogic mode characterized by longer turns, contrasting viewpoints, and reflective discussion (Salmon & Barrera, 2021; Howe et al., 2019).

Across all question types, student engagement emerged through interactional enactment rather than question type alone. Behavioral engagement was evident in students' active participation, turn-taking, and willingness to respond; cognitive engagement was evident in moments of explanation, reasoning, and evaluation; and emotional engagement was evident in confidence, curiosity, and concern for the discussed issues. These dimensions were most strongly activated when the teacher pursued students' responses, invited elaboration, and validated their contributions. This finding reinforces multidimensional models of engagement, which emphasize that engagement is dynamically constructed through classroom interaction rather than triggered solely by instructional inputs (Fredricks et al., 2016; Wong & Liem, 2021). In this sense, questioning functions as an interactional practice that organizes classroom discourse and mediates students' access to learning opportunities, rather than as a simple technique for eliciting answers (Duran & Jacknick, 2020; Vrikki & Evagorou, 2022).

However, the findings also reveal important challenges that constrained the effectiveness of questioning strategies. A key obstacle was students' limited prior content knowledge, which often restricted their ability to respond meaningfully to probing, divergent, and higher-order questions. Although students were perceived as linguistically capable, gaps in conceptual understanding hindered deeper engagement, resulting in

superficial answers or limited argumentation. This mismatch between language proficiency and content knowledge has been noted in previous EFL classroom studies and highlights the need for explicit schema activation and content scaffolding when using open-ended questioning with young learners (Astrid et al., 2019; Kholisoh & Bharati, 2021). A second challenge involved responding to students' divergent questions. While the teacher was able to generate open-ended prompts, responding to students' unexpected or conceptually complex inquiries proved demanding, particularly when misconceptions emerged or when questions extended beyond planned content. In such moments, sustaining productive dialogue became more difficult, potentially reducing participation and emotional engagement. This challenge echoes earlier findings that effective dialogic questioning requires not only pedagogical skill but also strong content preparedness and interactional responsiveness on the part of the teacher (Rido, 2017; Van Balen et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study examined teacher questioning practices in a primary EFL classroom by exploring the types and distribution of questions, how questioning was enacted to stimulate student engagement, and the challenges encountered in implementing questioning strategies. The findings show that teacher questioning functioned as a purposeful, interactive practice rather than a uniform instructional technique. Factual questions dominated classroom interaction and played an important role in establishing shared understanding, maintaining lesson flow, and supporting participation among young learners. In a context where students' content knowledge was uneven, the frequent use of factual questions was pedagogically strategic, providing a necessary foundation for engagement before more cognitively demanding questioning could occur.

Beyond factual questioning, the study found that probing, divergent, and higher-order questions contributed in distinct ways to student engagement when enacted through appropriate interactional moves. Probing questions supported students in extending responses and articulating reasoning, thereby promoting cognitive engagement and encouraging more sustained participation. Divergent questions opened space for multiple perspectives and personal connections, fostering social interaction and emotional involvement. Higher-order questions most clearly stimulated analytical and evaluative thinking, shifting classroom discourse toward more dialogic interaction characterized by longer student turns and reflective discussion. Across all question types, student engagement emerged through how questions were pursued, followed up, and validated, highlighting the importance of interactional enactment in shaping behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement.

The study also identified key challenges that constrained the effectiveness of questioning strategies. Students' limited prior content knowledge often restricted their ability to respond meaningfully to open-ended and higher-level questions, despite adequate linguistic ability. In addition, responding to students' divergent questions posed difficulties for the teacher, particularly when misconceptions arose or when questions extended beyond planned content. These challenges underscore the need for careful scaffolding, activation of background knowledge, and strong teacher preparedness when implementing dialogic questioning in primary EFL classrooms.

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