

Are the Right Questions being Asked? An Investigation of Questioning Proficiency among Pre-service Teachers

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Abstract

Teaching and learning call for a meaningful and interactive climate to enhance the thinking abilities of the learners through proficient teacher questioning skills. Understanding how effectively pre-service teachers pose questions is vital in preparing them for actual teaching. Thus, this study investigates a) the kinds of questions pre-service teachers ask, b) the level of competence in the art of questioning, and c) the difficulties associated with it. The participants were 27 pre-service teachers and 24 cooperating teachers. Anchored on Bloom's Taxonomy as the framework of the study, the investigation employed classroom observations, video-recorded lessons, documentary analysis, and interviews. Lesson plans were analyzed to validate the data gathered. Interviews were conducted to unveil the difficulties pre-service teachers encountered. Findings show that most of the cognitive questions asked by pre-service teachers were lower order thinking questions. The level of proficiency is high demonstrating strong abilities in formulating questions in remembering, understanding, and applying; average showcasing moderate abilities in formulating questions along analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers include a) formulating higher-order thinking questions, b) eliciting responses, c) rephrasing, or simplifying questions, d) giving follow-up or deepening/probing questions, and e) confusion on the type of questions to ask to suit the student's level of learning. The effective asking of questions by pre-service teachers requires practice and training. The study suggests the incorporation of intensive training on the art of questioning in the training programs of teacher education institutions before internship.

Keywords: *kinds of questions, level of proficiency, difficulties, higher-order thinking skills, lower-order thinking skills*

Introduction

Twenty-first-century learning demands meaningful, collaborative, exciting, and interactive strategies that teachers employ during the teaching-learning process. The classroom experience should be rich with very stimulating, challenging, and engaging classroom activities through innovative approaches that contribute to the curiosity and interest of the learners. There is a need to foster meaningful and engaging teaching-learning interactions through skillful questioning of teachers. Teachers should motivate the learners to think even if they resist doing so.

Good learning starts with questions, not answers. Asking the right question is the heart of effective communication and information exchange. Using the right questions in a particular situation, one can improve a whole range of communication skills. As Neil Postman (1999, p. 2) pointed out "Wisdom means knowing what questions to ask about knowledge. Wisdom does not imply having the right answers. It implies only asking the right questions." The learners can be intensely curious, exhibiting a questioning attitude that reflects an understanding of language. Implementing suitable approaches can provide essential support to the learners, aiding them in comprehending and recognizing the significance of the questioning process as a tool for fostering critical

thinking and inquiry. Strategies for teaching and learning and the importance of critical thinking skills will ensure that the next generation of students is equipped with capabilities to address problems they may encounter (Klinger & Coffman, 2023).

In the context of the kinds of questions asked by teachers, Banuag (2022) revealed that prevalent types of questions were retrieval style and yes or no questions that belonged to low cognitive levels. Also, based on observations, many teachers rarely pose questions that enhance higher-order thinking skills. In the study of Alnofal (2018) majority of the first-year teachers' questions are lower-cognitive levels (remembering, understanding, and applying). Comprehension-based questions played a prominent role in classroom teaching while analyzing, evaluating, and creating questions were unrepresented. In a teaching learning process, there is a need for progression of information and extended stretches of questioning that build from facts towards insightful revelations or complex ideas. The progression of information and extended questioning creates an effective learning environment. It supports cognitive development, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the subject matter leading to more meaningful learning.

Other researchers uncovered the questioning methods of teachers centered on convergent thinking, knowledge, and comprehension types (Bibi et al., 2020). Teachers infrequently asked questions at the analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating levels. The researchers underscored the importance of incorporating more frequent use of higher-order, thought-provoking questions. To achieve this goal, it is recommended to employ a structured framework such as Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom's Taxonomy is a multi-tiered model of classifying thinking according to six cognitive levels of complexity. The lowest three levels are: knowledge, comprehension, and application. The highest three levels are: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Forehand, 2010). This was revised by Lorin Anderson and was referred to as the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy categorized into six levels of cognitive skills ranging from lower to higher order thinking: *remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating*. *Remembering* involves recalling relevant information from long term memory. It includes activities like retrieving, recognizing, and recalling knowledge. *Understanding* focuses on various forms of communication, such as oral, written, and graphic messages. It involves interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining. *Applying* emphasizes the ability to carry out or use a procedure through executing or implementing what has been learned. *Analyzing* focuses on breaking down material into its constituent parts. This involves determining how these parts relate to one another and to an overall structure

or purpose through differentiating, organizing, and attributing. *Evaluating* involves making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing. *Creating*, the highest level, focuses on putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole. This involves reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing (Forehand, 2005). Bloom's Taxonomy is a significant tool for teachers to plan and assess learning activities that engage the learners at various levels of learning.

The effectiveness of questions in a learning environment lies on the quality of questions. Therefore, the questions must be congruent with the objectives of the lessons, relevant to the subject matter, accurate in grammar and use of words, and clearly enunciated. According to Ravi et al. (2014, p. 426), "Asking the right question in the right way is an art (and a science)." They emphasized that in a community question-answering setting, a good question is not just a question that is useful and relevant to others: a question is good if it is also presented clearly. In the analysis of their finding, they revealed that higher quality questions continue to garner interest overtime in comparison to lower quality questions. Likewise, when teachers pose congruent (aligned with the lesson's objectives), relevant (pertained directly to the subject matter), accurate (demonstrated precision in grammar and language usage) and clear (articulated with a well-modulated voice) questions during the teaching-learning interaction, they reignite the learner's curiosity and stimulate the development of critical thinking abilities. Furthermore, Zulueta (2006) emphasized the attributes of a good question, highlighting the importance of simplicity, clarity, and definiteness. Using straightforward language is encouraged to prevent ambiguity and confusion. Teachers' proficiency in asking questions is gauged through the quality of questions posed in a learning environment, thus creating an engaging and stimulating classroom interaction.

Developing and enhancing the proficiency of pre-service teachers in the art of questioning should start vigorously from the time of practice teaching. This training for pre-service teachers is an academic responsibility of all teacher education institutions (TEIs). TEIs should ensure that the pre-service teachers are well-trained in the art of questioning – one of the teaching competencies that would lead them to become effective professional teachers in the educational field. Bloom's Taxonomy can help plan and formulate higher-order questions. Moreover, to further understand the proficiency level of pre-service in the art of questioning, the difficulties encountered were examined in this study.

With the scarcity of higher order thinking questions evident in teaching-learning interactions, an investigative study was undertaken to further examine this issue. In this scholarly pursuit, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What kinds of questions do English pre-service teachers ask in teaching English lessons?

RQ2: What is the English pre-service teachers' level of proficiency in the art of questioning in developing cognitive skills of students in terms of a) remembering, b) understanding, c) applying, d) analyzing, e) evaluating, and f) creating?

RQ3: What are the difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers in the art of questioning?

Materials and Methods

Research Method

The study employed the descriptive method of research which utilized classroom observation, video-recorded lessons, documentary analysis, and interviews. According to Salaria (2012), a descriptive study, which describes and interprets the data, is concerned with conditions and relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, evident effects, or trends that are developing. It is primarily concerned with the present, although it often considers past events and influences as they relate to current conditions. This method is, therefore, considered suitable for determining the art of questioning utilized in actual classroom situations.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study consisted of 27 Bachelor of Secondary Education English pre-service teachers who were deployed in different cooperating schools for teaching internships. Additionally, the study involves 24 cooperating teachers who supervised and guided the pre-service teachers during their teaching internship. The data on the kinds of questions asked, the level of proficiency in the art of questioning, and the difficulties encountered were obtained from both groups of participants.

Sampling Techniques

This study utilized purposive sampling. The participants were chosen to align with the study's objectives. These selected individuals were best suited to address the study's focus on exploring the kinds of questions asked, the level of competence, and the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers in the realm of questioning. As the future conveyor of

knowledge to the next generation, it is essential to enhance their ability to facilitate meaningful learning experiences to help the learners develop the skills they need to succeed academically.

Research Instruments

The data collection instruments comprised a set of tools, including a class observation form or checklist and interview guides for both pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers. The class information form is structured into three parts: the first part is designed to gather essential information about the pre-service teacher, the cooperating teacher, grade level taught, lesson objectives, subject matter and date and time of observation, while the second part contains a checklist categorizing questions into lower-order and the higher-order thinking. The third part includes evidence to assess elements in the art of questioning, i.e., congruence, relevance, accuracy, and clarity. These elements helped determine whether the pre-service teachers fall into the categories of experts (very high), practitioners (high), apprentice (average) and novice (low). The class observation form or checklist facilitated the gathering of the data regarding the kinds of questions asked and the level of proficiency exhibited by pre-service teachers in the art of questioning.

The interview guide for pre-service teachers consisted of a series of questions to uncover the difficulties faced by the pre-service teachers. Similarly, an interview guide intended for cooperating teachers included a set of questions focused on identifying the challenges experienced by pre-service teachers in the realm of questioning. These instruments underwent validation by experts in English education who evaluated them against a rubric to ensure their reliability, and validity.

Data Gathering Procedures

Having sought approval from the school authorities to conduct the study, the researchers conducted the data collection, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

Lesson Plan Analysis. In this study, the researchers gathered the lessons plans of the pre-service teachers before the demonstration teaching sessions. A documentary analysis was then employed, scrutinizing the detailed lesson plans in conducting English lessons. Questions from the lesson plan were initially tabulated in a checklist categorized according to the different classifications of questions based on the Revised Blooms' Taxonomy. The examination of lesson plans identified the kinds of questions posed and the characteristics of questions asked by the pre-service teachers during their actual classroom teaching.

Classroom observations. Coordination with the pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers facilitated the scheduled class observations. In collaboration with the cooperating teacher, the researchers conducted real-time classroom observations during the actual teaching of pre-service teachers. The researcher and the cooperating teacher accomplished the class observation form or checklist as observed. In addition to this, with the permission of the participants, the researcher recorded the lesson proceedings. The researchers also conducted post conferences to discuss findings and provide feedback. The classroom observations furnished valuable data regarding the kinds of questions asked by the participants during English lessons as well as the level of proficiency in the art of questioning. These encoded data in the observation checklist underwent analysis, peer review and tallying. The recorded video lessons were assessed and reviewed by the primary researcher and a peer for accuracy and validity of recorded data. Both lesson plan analysis and classroom observations revealed the kinds of questions asked by pre-service teachers during the classroom interactions. Additionally, they uncovered the level of proficiency against congruence, accuracy, relevance, and clarity of questions.

Interviews. The researchers conducted interviews to the pre-service teachers and the cooperating teachers after the post conferences. The interview questions were asked to gather responses and unveil the difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers in the realm of asking questions.

All the data gathered from lesson plan analysis, classroom observations and interviews were collated, tabulated, reviewed by peer, and were provided with interpretation, discussion, and implications.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The statistical tools used include frequency, average, ranking, and percentage. The aim was to investigate the kinds of cognitive questions asked, and their level of competence in the art of questioning, determine the difficulties encountered, and identify potential areas for improvement.

Frequency was utilized to tally and count the total number of questions posed using specific question words under each category. This enabled the identification of the most used kinds of questions and provided insights into the patterns of question usage among pre-service teachers.

The *ranking* was employed to determine both the most frequently used and the least used types of questions and which kinds of questions should be

enhanced. Ranking was also applied to assess the difficulties encountered in the art of questioning.

Average calculations were performed by dividing the total number of questions by the number of cases, revealing the average number of questions within each type under a given question category. This technique assisted in describing the level of competence in the art of questioning and facilitated valid interpretations.

Percentage calculations were used to determine the proportion of respondents who commonly or least commonly used specific types of questions. Percentages were also employed to assess the level of competence in the art of questioning and to identify the percentage of participants who reported facing specific difficulties in this skill.

The 4-point Likert-type scale was utilized to quantify data regarding the Level of Competence in the Art of Questioning. This involved evaluating four elements—congruency, relevance, accuracy, and clarity. The scale ranged from *very high* for experts to *low* for novices.

Ethical Considerations

Safeguarding the confidentiality of data and respecting the privacy of the research participants were emphasized in this study. Before conducting class observations, informed consent was obtained by the researcher. This process ensured that the pre-service teachers and their cooperating teachers understood the observation's purpose, duration, and expected outcomes. An environment of trust and collaboration between the researcher as the observer and those being observed was established. This was achieved by establishing rapport between the researcher in the role of observer and the pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and students.

Results and Discussions

Kinds of Cognitive Questions Asked by Pre-service Teachers

The findings of the investigation, reflected in Figure 1, shed light on the kinds of questions posed by the BSED English pre-service teachers during their English lessons. These questions fall into two categories: 1) lower-order thinking and 2) higher-order thinking questions. Lower-order thinking questions encompass *remembering, understanding, and applying* questions, while higher-order thinking questions involve *analyzing, evaluating, and creating* inquiries.

Figure 1 illustrates that pre-service teachers frequently relied on lower order thinking questions, with *remembering* as the most used (133 instances), followed by *understanding* with a frequency of 107. *Applying* questions ranked third (73). In contrast, *analyzing* was least utilized (52), followed by *creating* (19) and *evaluating* (11).

Usually, teachers ask questions to elicit students' thoughts and encourage students to elaborate on their ideas (Lemke, 1990 as cited in Al-Zahrani & Al-Bargi, 2017). However, the findings in this study highlight that pre-service teachers often employ *remembering* questions to elicit quick responses from the students, rather than encouraging students to dig deeper into their thoughts and elaborate on their ideas. When using low-level questions, such as those beginning with *what*, students can easily respond to questions by extracting information directly from the text. The kinds of questions teacher asked can determine the level of thinking being developed in the learners. Low-level questions demand low level responses. They require responses of the simple recall or memory type of answers (Corpuz & Gloria, 2013). Therefore, encouraging thought-provoking and stimulating questions to elaborate on concepts should be employed. It is crucial for teachers to pose a diverse range of questions to promote a more meaningful and engaging classroom interactions.

Questions to ask must suit the level of intelligence of the students. The advanced students can be asked high-level questions that can stir their thinking abilities, while the struggling students may benefit from *wh- and how* questions, which can help them progress to higher order thinking and develop deeper and new understanding. This instructional approach is called scaffolding. Scaffolding was based on the concept of providing supportive assistance to the learner within the parameters of a learner's zone of proximal development. In the context of classroom interaction, the term scaffolding is the temporary assistance that teachers provide for their students to assist them in completing a task or develop understanding so that they will later be able to complete the tasks alone. Moreover, within a classroom situation, as emphasized by Fugate, et al. (2021) it is imperative to foster a culturally responsive teaching and learning environment. This involves understanding what the learners already know. By recognizing and leveraging the existing knowledge of learners, teachers can build upon what students already understand. Hence, formulating questions that progressed from basic to advanced level can significantly enhance the cognitive capacities of the learners.

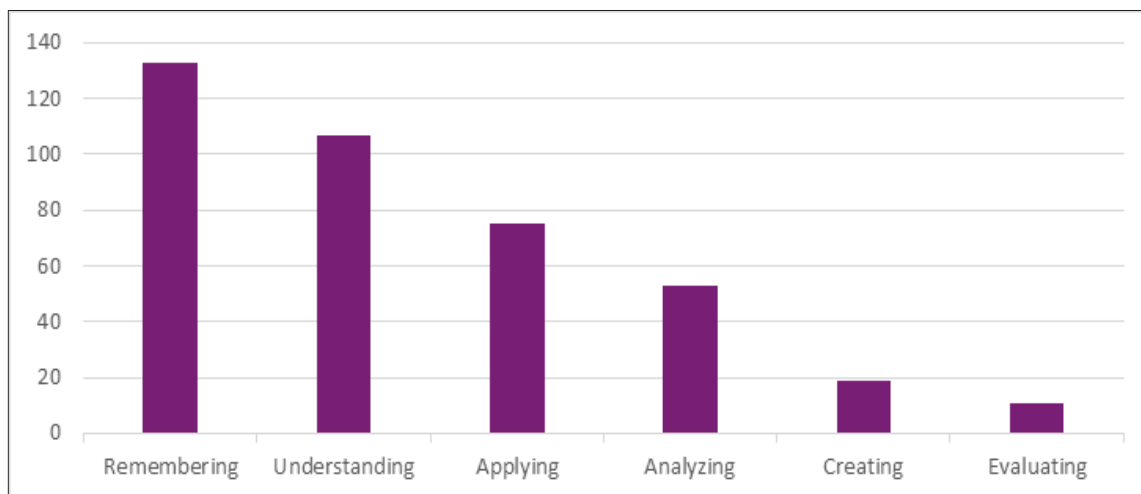


Figure 1 The Kinds of Questions BSED English Pre-service Teachers Asked in Teaching English Lessons

For a clearer illustration of the questions asked by pre-service teachers, the following matrix on the sample of questions asked is presented:

Remembering

What is the occasion?

What is the subject?

What is the subject-agreement rule for collective nouns?

What did the prince ask the fox?

How many seasons does the Philippines have?

Who is being addressed in the poem?

Understanding

Who is being represented by “battering rams”?

What does winter stand for?

The fox reminded the prince, “What is essential is invisible to the eye.” What does this mean?

Why is it not too late to start healing our environment?

Why do you think the speaker in the poem bows on his knees?

Is self-confidence important for a person? Why or why not?

Applying

Enhance the sentence by putting the appropriate embedded clause from the box.

Construct five sentences using embedded clauses.

Write the correct verb from the given choices.

Share some pertinent experiences when you realized that nature is like a mother to you. List them down.

In your own simple ways, what are the things that you want to do in order to save our mother earth?

If you were to choose one specific place that possess both history and beauty, what would it be?

Analyzing

What is the difference between the first set of pictures from the second one?

Look at the sentences on the board. What do you observe about them?

What happened when we reverse the order of the sentence so that the object comes before the subject?

How did he compare the other roses with his rose?

Based on this table, how would you differentiate APA and MLA parenthetical citations?

Identify what event the picture suggests. Try to guess the correct word by analyzing the three sets of pictures below.

Evaluating

What is the author’s purpose in writing the article?

Why was the poem entitled, “Song of Autumn?”

Do you agree with the author on the following points?

How do you view the persona’s circumstance?

As a millennial, how are you affected by the article?

Do you think the title of the poem is related to what is happening now to Earth?

Creating

Make a slogan about the poem’s theme and explain it in class.

Construct a narrative paragraph about your experience of greatness.

Write an example of in-text citations for paraphrasing and summarizing.

Write a news report about the Mt. Mayon eruption using direct and reported speech.

Write a one-stanza poem about the current situation of nature.

On a colored paper, write a short letter of encouragement.

Table 1 includes the kinds of questions asked by pre-service teachers and the lead question words used in posing questions during the teaching-learning process. As indicated in the table, the lead question *What* ranked first among the lead question words likely because it was an easy question and required no rephrasing. The pre-service teachers found the *What* questions more effective in engaging students and assessing their understanding. In the interview with the pre-service teachers, they noted that *What* questions were easily found in the text and easily understood by students. They expressed that they start with low-level questions to test whether they pay attention to details and information. The other pre-service teacher added that he asks *Wh*-questions first (what, when, where, who), then progresses to the *Why* and *How* questions. The pre-service teachers prefer to use *What* questions the most among the various types of questions.

Imperative statements, named as *others* in this study, ranked second. These statements refer to the tasks asked by pre-service teachers for students to carry out and accomplish. They fall under the domain of applying and creating. According to Bloom’s Taxonomy, applying corresponds to a lower-order thinking skill, while creating is considered a higher-order thinking skill. The survey predominantly presented imperative statements formulated by pre-service teachers related to applying. Alhassora et al. (2017) conducted a study wherein they discovered that many students faced substantial challenges demonstrating their creative thinking skills. They further highlighted that these students exhibited a deficiency in handling the top two levels of higher-order thinking skills – evaluating and creating, as evidenced by the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The findings of Alhassora et al. (2017) are aligned with the findings in this investigation that pre-service teachers tend to formulate statements classified as low level cognitive thinking skills.

Furthermore, questions on *be-verbs* or *yes/no* questions ranked third in frequency. They include: *Are you familiar with Renaissance? Have you ever been to the house of*

horrors? Is cyberbullying still evident in this generation? Does it happen on different social media platforms? The lead questions *Which* have a frequency of nine (9) and *When* with a frequency of five (5). No questions were formulated using the lead question *Where* (0). Examples of the least questions asked include: *When do we use the active voice in forming sentences? When do we provide an in-text citation?* and *Which do you think used the APA format for an in-text citation?* In this case, the pre-service teachers found other question kinds relevant in their teaching context, and have not considered *Where* questions as applicable or essential.

The findings in this study show the imbalance in the questioning techniques in teaching English lessons. This emphasizes the critical need and importance to strike a balance in the questions asked by the pre-service teachers to enhance analytical, evaluative, and creative thinking. Incorporating a mix and diverse range of both low and high-level questions can ultimately lead to the attainment of the learning objectives and development of critical thinking abilities. Moreover, the acquisition of higher-order thinking among students is important to meet and satisfy today’s complex learning (Danielson, 2007, as cited in Alhassora et al., 2017).

The findings underscore the need to balance the questions asked by the pre-service teachers to enhance the students’ cognitive abilities. If the pre-service teachers deliver a well-balanced lesson that consists of both lower and higher-order thinking questions, the thinking skills of students can be fully developed. According to Tofade et al. (2013), balance is to ask convergent and divergent questions from multiple knowledge domains and at varying cognitive levels. For example, pre-service teachers may ask low level questions to get students involved and interested, then move to high order thinking questions. Achieving balance also requires paying attention to the frequency at which questions are used relative to the time spent presenting new information, providing examples, and engaging students in other active-learning activities (Tofade et al., 2013).

Table 1 Kinds of Questions the BSED English Pre-service Teachers Ask in Teaching English Lessons

Kinds of Questions	Lead Question Words									Total	Rank
	Who	What	Where	When	Which	Why	How	Be-verb	Others		
Remembering ¹	9	83	0	1	0	0	0	25	15	133	1
Understanding ¹	3	43	0	0	3	17	14	23	4	107	2
Applying ¹	0	25	0	1	0	6	14	2	25	73	3
Analyzing ²	0	18	0	1	6	3	13	2	9	52	4
Evaluating ²	0	0	0	2	0	2	3	4	0	11	6
Creating ²	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	19	5
Total	12	169	0	5	9	28	44	56	72	395	
Rank	6	1	9	8	7	5	4	3	2		

¹Low Level Thinking Questions, ²High Level Thinking Questions

Level of Proficiency in the Art of Questioning in Developing Cognitive Skills

The survey assessed the proficiency of pre-service teachers in developing the six cognitive skills in terms of remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. This assessment was based on the following criteria: congruency of the questions with the objectives of the lesson, relevance of the question to the subject matter, grammatical accuracy of the question, and clarity of the question asked using a well-modulated voice.

Table 2 shows that the pre-service teachers excel as practitioners (*high*) in formulating questions pertaining to remembering, understanding, and applying. In these areas, the elements of congruence, relevance, accuracy, and clarity are notably evident. However, there are apprentices (*average*) in evaluating and creating due to grammatical errors that impinged the accuracy and precision of the questions raised.

Table 2 Level of Proficiency in the Art of Questioning in Developing Cognitive Skills (n=27)

Cognitive Skills	Questions (f)	Elements in the Art of Questioning (%)				Average	Description	Interpretation
		Congruence	Relevance	Accuracy	Clarity			
Remembering	150	92	92	85	85	88.50	High	Practitioner
Understanding	104	90	90	83	83	86.50	High	Practitioner
Applying	85	89	89	80	82	85.00	High	Practitioner
Analyzing	64	89	89	84	84	86.50	High	Practitioner
Evaluating	11	82	82	73	73	77.50	Average	Apprentice
Creating	19	84	84	74	74	79.00	Average	Apprentice
Total	433	87.67	87.67	79.83	80.17	83.83	High	Practitioner
Rank		1.5	1.5	4	3			

The pre-service teachers made grammatical errors in asking questions that affected the accuracy and clarity of their questions. These errors were evident during the classroom observations where grammar errors in sentence construction, particularly in word order, subject-verb agreement, choice of words, use of tag questions, and use of correct verb forms, were observed. Al-Zahrani and Al-Bargi (2017)

posited that the issue on the effectiveness of classroom teaching is influenced not only by varied abilities of students but also by the clarity of the teacher’s questions. Unclear questions may lead to the confusions of the learners. The matrix below illustrates the errors of pre-service observed in the execution of their English lessons that indicate their level of competence.

Errors	Correct Construction of Questions
Use of the auxiliary verbs do, does, and did	
What did he asked me?	What did he ask me?
What does nature looks like?	What does nature look like?
What does autumn stands for?	What does autumn stand for?
What does winter stands for?	What does winter stand for?
How does a paragraph ended?	How did the paragraph end?
How do you think did the character in the story showed kindness or greatness?	How do you think did the character in the story show kindness or greatness?
How did Handiong won over his enemies?	How did Handiong win over his enemies?
Framing of questions	
What is the reported speech of this?	What is the reported speech of this sentence?
How they are similar?	How are they similar?
Mathematics and news belong to what?	Where do Mathematics and news belong?
Subject-verb agreement	
What is its effects?	What are its effects?
How do the article affect you?	How does the article affect you?
Use of tag questions	
Can you guess on your learning package, weren't you?	You can guess what the learning package is about, can't you?
Code switching	
The shift in the use of the English language as a medium of instruction in an English class was also observed. Some pre-service teachers tend to speak in Bikol if the students find the question confusing.	If possible, it is advisable to avoid code-switching. Learners should be encouraged to communicate in English because language acquisition often comes through active usage.

According to Al-Zahrani and Al-Bargi (2017), the problem not only comes from the diverse students' abilities but also from the proficiency of the teachers themselves. Some studies have found that some teachers occasionally express an unclear question, resulting in students' confusion. The matrix underscores errors made by pre-service teachers in utilizing auxiliary verbs 'do, does, and did.' Nugroho (2014) similarly concluded that the students face problems using these auxiliaries. To ensure clarity in asking questions and prevent confusion, the pre-service teachers must demonstrate proficiency using auxiliary verbs 'do, does and did.' According to the rule, when utilizing these auxiliary verbs, the main verb should be in its base form.

In the interview conducted by Rajitha and Alamelu (2020), the students expressed, "Sometimes I can't be able to frame sentences, I am afraid whether my sentence formation is correct or not, I have a problem with grammar, that my words used in the sentence is correct or not". Additionally, one student conveyed, 'grammatical errors' and 'sentence

formation' as difficulties, and another stated, 'I can't be able to frame sentences.'" Similarly, this study observed that pre-service teachers encountered the same difficulties. Therefore, the pre-teachers should review the basic sentence patterns, like in this question: "How they are similar?" In this case, the format should be, "How are they similar?" with the verb preceding the pronoun.

Achieving correct agreement between the subject and the verb is also a difficulty of pre-service teachers during the teaching learning process illustrated in these examples: "What is its effects?" and "How do the article affect you? The verb must agree with its subject in number and in person (Mali & Yulia, 2012). Thus, the appropriate sentence construction for the questions should be, "What are their effects?" and "How do the articles affect you?"

The use of tag questions is another difficulty for pre-service teachers. According to Kim and Ann (2008), tag questions can be used in asking for information, expecting confirmation from the hearer, emphasizing

what the speaker says, making sure of the truth of what the speaker says to facilitate the conversation, and challenging a statement. The question formulated by the pre-service teacher in this study, “*Can you guess on your learning package, weren’t you?*” is incorrect because the verb ‘*weren’t*’ used in the tag question does not agree with the verb ‘*can*’ in the main statement. The correct statement should be, “*You can guess what the learning package is about, can’t you?*” The auxiliary in the tag should agree with the tense, aspect, and modality of the auxiliary verb in the anchoring clause. In addition to this, when the main clause is positive, the tag question is negative, and vice versa. The pronoun in the tag also agrees with the person, number, and gender (Kim & Ann, 2008).

Another challenge experienced by pre-service teachers is code switching. It is the practice of alternating between two or more languages during classroom interaction. The researchers observed that pre-service teachers incorporate English as the primary medium of instruction with other languages. Moore (2010) emphasized that using the first language in a classroom context remains a challenge. It is advisable to minimize code switching as it may hinder progress in mastering the English language. According to Nurhamidah et al. (2018), proponents view code-switching an advantageous tool in language instruction. Opponents perceive it as barrier in acquiring the English language. Although some proponents believe that code switching helps clarify concepts, others argue it can hinder language acquisition. Consequently, it is advisable to limit code switching as learners can learn the English language if they speak the language.

Mastery in grammatical structures can help in

achieving proficiency in the art of questioning. The pre-service teachers need enhancement activities in improving their English grammar before they are formally deployed to the different cooperating schools for their practice teaching. Addressing these areas of concern can lead to more effective teaching practices and improved learning experiences for students. Through the enhancement activities, the pre-service teachers can gain more confidence in conducting classes because they have acquired the necessary skills in communication.

Difficulties Encountered by Pre-service Teachers in Teaching English Lessons along the Art of Questioning

The research comprised 27 pre-service teachers and the 24 cooperating teachers who were interviewed to gain insights on the difficulties faced by the pre-service teachers in teaching English lessons particularly the art of questioning. The findings, as revealed in Table 3, are 1) formulating higher-order thinking questions, 2) eliciting responses from the students to the questions raised, 3) rephrasing/simplifying the questions raised; 4) giving follow-up questions/deepening; 5) confusion on the type of question to ask to suit the level of learning of students; 6) use of appropriate question words in asking a question; 7) observing correct grammar in raising a question; 8) feeling awkward when no student can answer the question; 9) articulating a question; 8) lack of confidence in asking a question; and 11) raising a relevant question.

The succeeding discussions focus on the top four difficulties encountered by the pre-service teachers when formulating and asking questions during classroom interactions.

Table 3 Difficulties Met by Pre-Service Teachers in Teaching English Lessons along the Art of Questioning

Difficulties	CT	PST	Total	%	Rank
Formulating higher order thinking questions	24	23	47	92	1
Eliciting responses from the students to the question raised	22	21	43	84	2
Rephrasing/Simplifying the question raised	23	10	33	65	3.5
Giving follow-up question / deepening	23	10	33	65	3.5
Confusion on the type of question to ask to suit the level of learning of students	6	6	12	24	5
Use of appropriate question word in asking question	5	6	11	22	6.5
Observing correct grammar in raising question	5	6	11	22	6.5
Feeling awkward when no student can answer the question	4	4	8	16	8
Articulating a question	4	3	7	14	9
Lack of confidence in asking a question	2	2	4	8	10
Raising relevant questions	1	1	2	4	11

CT – Cooperating Teachers (n=24), PST – Pre-service Teachers (n=27)

Formulating high order thinking questions involves creating questions beyond simple factual recall that require critical thinking and a deeper understanding of a topic. These are questions under analyzing, evaluating, and creating, categorized under higher-order thinking skills (Hayikaleng et al. 2016). Crafting higher-order thinking questions is the primary difficulty of pre-service teachers. One participant expressed, "I find it hard to formulate questions that make the students understand easily. Another participant shared, "I usually have difficulties when it comes to asking a critical question to the lower section class." Some other pre-service teachers echoed similar sentiments regarding formulating high order thinking questions, "I am having difficulty constructing deep questions wherein my students would be able to comprehend. Sometimes, I must translate higher order thinking skills (HOTS) on open-ended questions in Filipino for my students to understand my questions."

The cooperating teachers affirmed these responses, "The pre-service utilizes varied types from simplest kind to challenging ones, though it is evident that there is still a need to improve her questioning skill to maximize the potentials of the students." Another cooperating teacher emphasized, "The pre-service teachers need to formulate questions that require students to synthesize. They "occasionally ask questions that develop evaluative and creative skills". The investigation revealed that only a few pre-service teachers demonstrate proficiency in crafting high-order high-order thinking questions. Aligned with Afifah and Retnawati's (2019) findings, teachers still struggle to teach higher-order thinking skills, particularly in preparing learning materials based on higher-order thinking. Hence, formulating questions that require higher-order thinking skills remains an ongoing challenge.

In this scenario, teacher education institutions can create a comprehensive program to equip pre-service teachers with the necessary skills and proficiency to craft higher-order thinking questions. Emphasis on the art of questioning should be integrated in the curriculum, specifically providing a comprehensive knowledge on Bloom's Taxonomy. This will help pre-service teachers understand the different levels of cognitive thinking and how to formulate questions that stimulate critical thinking. Lectures and workshops can also be conducted by inviting experienced educators and experts to share their strategies and best practices in formulating higher order thinking questions. This can be provided as preparatory sessions before embarking on their teaching internship.

Eliciting responses. Eliciting responses involves a technique at prompting learners to share their

knowledge by activating what they gained through reading and discussion. In this study, the pre-service teachers encountered challenges in eliciting responses from the students. One of the pre-service teachers acknowledged: "Students find it difficult to answer questions in the English language so, for me, I devise a question in the most basic form I can use." Another pre-service teacher shared, "I encourage students to answer in a modulated voice. I also require them to formulate questions of their own." The other pre-service teacher expressed, "I encourage reserved students to write their answers or questions."

Cooperating teachers observed that students respond to various kinds of questions including "divergent, literal, interpretative, factual, closed, yes-no questions, easy questions and those that require students to recall specific information from the text as well as subjective and wh- questions. They shared, "Questions that are classified under the simpler levels easily answered, although most of the time, as part of the processing, there is not much of a problem at all when it comes to answering the higher levels of questioning." Furthermore, another cooperating teacher mentioned, "He/She utilizes varied types from simplest kind to challenging ones, though it is evident that there is still a need to improve her questioning skill to maximize the potentials of the students."

The questions that are not answered with ease by students, according to the cooperating teachers are HOTS questions – inferential and interpretive, evaluative, critical, analysis, synthesis, creative and application questions in which the answer could not be lifted directly from the text. These questions require reasoning and inferring meaning and message of the passage. The students have ideas in mind, but it is difficult on their part to express them. The students need to acquire the skill in productive and active expression of thoughts and ideas. To encourage students to share and express their ideas, there is a need to improve the teaching strategies in the art of questioning to uplift the students' skill in self-expression.

Based on the interview, students respond to questions with ease when pre-service teachers skillfully employ questions of different levels. The students can answer the questions asked by the pre-service teachers if they are skillful enough in the questioning process. They must ask questions from simple ones and let it unfold to the higher level until the students' mind are stimulated and develop the skill in creativity; thus, learning becomes awe-inspiring. Fitriati et al. (2017) emphasized that questioning skills are crucial to successfully make students engage in the classroom interaction, enhance their verbal responses, and lead to the comprehension of the lesson. They suggest that teachers should be more aware of their questioning skills to assist students achieve better proficiency in the English language.

Rephrasing and simplifying the questions. The third difficulty of pre-service teachers is rephrasing and simplifying the questions. One pre-service teacher expressed, "Sometimes I find it difficult to simplify my questions." Another pre-service teacher shared, "I encourage the students to explain what they understand and aid them in understanding the lesson from literal to the deepest sense." Moreover, one cooperating teacher added, "He/She utilizes varied types from simplest kind to challenging ones, though it is evident that there is still a need to improve her questioning skill so as to maximize the potentials of the students."

According to Al-Zahrani and Al-Bargi (2017), if the teachers cannot elicit students' verbal responses, it may affect the quality of classroom interaction. Most teachers aim to engage students through questions; but they fail to elicit responses from the students during the teaching learning process. The problem does not only come from the students' abilities but also from the teachers himself.

"Rephrasing, simplification, repetition, decomposition, probing, translating, and blank filling were applied by both effective teachers as their questioning strategies. Probing was the dominant strategy that effective teachers used in classroom interaction. It also showed that the teacher utilized strategies to avoid failure in eliciting verbal responses, expand their answer, develop critical thinking, release embarrassment, and build confidence. Furthermore, by utilizing these questioning strategies, particularly probing, the teacher could expand students' responses and make the students more attentive and engaged in the teaching and learning process" (Hasanuddin et al. 2021, p. 288).

The questioning strategies proposed by Hasanuddin et al. (2021) are tools that can help the teachers elicit students' verbal responses. The teacher should know the right way in asking questions because how teachers deliver the questions will influence students' understanding. Utilizing these questioning strategies, the teacher can achieve an engaging classroom interaction.

Asking follow-up questions / deepening. The fourth among the difficulties encountered by pre-service teachers is giving follow-up or deepening. While many pre-service teachers are proficient in asking follow-up questions to guide the students towards higher order thinking skills, some encounter

difficulties in this area. As one cooperating teacher pointed out, "Initially, the questions he constructed lacks deepening; however, after feedbacking the observation to him, he was able to add up questions that will deepen the students' understanding of the text; he applies different levels of questions but seldom the creative level of asking questions".

In the study of Hu et al. (2017), teachers demonstrated a grasp of feedback techniques as recognition, back-and-forth exchanges, and teacher persistence. However, they showed limitations in utilizing scaffolding to foster children's critical thinking in their responses and actions. On the other hand, cooperating teachers noted that under their guidance, the pre-service teachers provide positive feedback, such as praising and giving higher points to those who respond to questions correctly.

Another cooperating teacher revealed, "If the question is difficult for the students to comprehend, he is not yet adept in rephrasing for the students to understand. They need improvement "in giving follow-up questions based on the answers of the students". Likely because of her young age and lack of experiences in the field of teaching." Asking to follow up questions or deepening can guide the students towards a deeper understanding of the concepts presented. Additionally, it can help clarify ambiguities in the information and responses provided. Also, follow up questions can direct the learners to focus on the key points or issues that are important in class discussion.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, the researchers investigated the questioning skills of pre-service teachers during their practice teaching. Through documentary analysis, classroom observations, and interviews, they examined the kinds of questions asked, the proficiency level of pre-service teachers in asking questions, and the difficulties encountered during their teaching internship. The results revealed that pre-service teachers tend to pose lower-level cognitive questions or simple recall. Additionally, the pre-service teachers excel as practitioners who are actively engaged and practice the skill in the art of questioning but still need more training to gain expertise in classroom teaching. Nevertheless, the pre-service teachers experienced varied difficulties in asking questions, particularly in formulating higher-order thinking questions.

In conclusion, pre-service teachers need to enhance their questioning skills so that the questions asked during the teaching-learning process encompass not only low-order thinking questions but also high-order thinking questions. This approach is essential

to foster the holistic cognitive development of the learners. Additionally, it is imperative to provide enhancement activities in improving English grammar and instilling confidence to overcome difficulties before pre-service teachers are deployed formally for an internship to the different cooperating schools. During this preparatory and training stage, cooperating teachers should be actively involved in reviewing, checking, and providing guidance on crafting lesson plans to ensure a balanced approach to the questions asked by the pre-service teachers during teaching practice. This intervention is significant in honing the effectiveness and skills of questioning to achieve teaching objectives.

While this study yielded valuable findings, it is also important to acknowledge certain limitations related to factors such as sample size, design, context, and locale. To address these constraints, the researchers recommend that future researchers undertake a comprehensive investigation into the art of questioning among pre-service teachers. Despite these limitations, this study still furnishes substantial evidence regarding the types of questions asked by pre-service teachers in teaching English, their proficiency levels in this skill, and the difficulties encountered in developing questioning abilities.

Declarations

The participants granted informed consent for their participation in this research. The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with the conduct of this study.

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