

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In typical language classrooms students listen to the teacher most of the time. Nunan (1995) and others have shown that teacher talk dominates the classrooms. He reported that the teachers involved in his in-service programme were very surprised to realize the amount of talking teachers did.

Teacher talk is found to be related to language acquisition. Nunan (1990) states that teacher talk is very important for language acquisition since comprehensible target language input that students are likely to receive comes from the teacher.

One essential aspect of teacher talk is teacher questions. Teachers pose questions and expect students to answer. Emphasizing that questions and answers are something particular in classroom interaction, White and Lightbown (1984:228) points out “The asking and answering of questions is a part of almost any conversational exchange, but it is particularly characteristic of classroom interaction”. Rephrasing what Mehan (1978) puts forward, White and Lightbown (1984) further states that the use of questions inside classrooms is not the same as the one of those outside classrooms as the questions teachers pose are not intended to sustain a conversation or elicit new information but rather to allow the teachers to evaluate the student’ understanding of subject matter.

Teacher questions have been the focus of research attention in both content classrooms and language classrooms for many years (Nunan, 1990, 1995). Though a lot of research into teacher questions (see for example Rowe, 1986 and White and Lightbown, 1984) have been carried out, it does not mean that some others need not be performed any more. Nunan (1995:198) points out that teachers’ questions need monitoring due to their potential to stimulate student responses. In short similar study can still be conducted in another context, namely in EFL classes. Interested in the area of teacher questions, the writer wants to learn more about the use of teacher questions in EFL classes.

1.2 Research Questions

Being especially challenged in trying a small professional action, the writer conducts this study to investigate how teachers' providing feedback after assigning a task influences the students' classroom participation. More particularly, the following questions are investigated:

1. How long do EFL teachers wait after asking questions?
2. To what extent does each type of question influence students' participation?
3. What particular strategies are employed when the EFL teachers do not get the expected responses/correct answers to the exercise?
4. How different are the strategies employed by teachers at the English Department from the ones employed by those at the non-English Department?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide more insights about the nature of teacher questions. It is also expected that the findings of this study will increase teachers' awareness about questioning strategies influencing student participation in class. The language students can hopefully gain more benefits as the teachers – with more insight and more awareness about their posing questions – provide them with more comprehensible input which is useful for language acquisition.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the following issues:

1. The teachers' feedback is restricted to the questions posed by the teachers excluding the ones by the students.
2. The questions are obtained in grammar classes only.
3. The questions are restricted merely to the ones appearing during the discussion of the task or exercise excluding the discussion or the explanation of the grammatical items.
4. This study does not try to analyze teacher's questions for their grammaticality.
5. The analysis for the teachers' strategies in handling wrong or unexpected answers are focused merely on teachers' questions.
6. The English Department context is limited to the classes at the university level in Indonesia where the students major in English which is a foreign language.

7. The non-English Department context is limited to the classes at Senior High School in Indonesia where the students are taught English which is a foreign language.