VietTESOL International Convention 2026

REPOSITIONING ENGLISH:
FROM FOREIGN TO SECOND LANGUAGE
Danang, 27 - 29 August 2026

VietTESOL Association
VIETNAM ASSOCIATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH

THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG
UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGES PROJECT

(#1728) EXPLORING THE EFL TEACHER QUESTIONING ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT TASK PERFORMANCE IN DONG THAP

TRAN THI TUYET NHUNG & Dr. LE THANH NGUYET ANH

ABSTRACT

Teacher questioning is often considered the heartbeat of the EFL classroom; however, questioning practices remain complex and multifaceted. This quantitative study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions of and practices regarding classroom questioning. A questionnaire was administered to 122 EFL teachers working at public high schools in Dong Thap Province to collect data on their perceptions and questioning practices. The findings revealed a noticeable gap between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. Although the participants demonstrated a strong understanding of the role of teacher questioning in promoting student engagement, traditional questioning patterns continued to dominate classroom interactions. The findings indicated a high frequency of display questions and an emphasis on lower-order cognitive processes, such as remembering and understanding, despite the recognized importance of fostering student engagement and higher-order thinking skills in EFL instruction. In contrast, evaluative and creative questions were rarely employed. Additionally, the participants reported both benefits and challenges associated with the use of questioning techniques in English classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Teacher Questioning in the EFL Classroom

-Pedagogical Evolution: Shifts from traditional classroom management/lesson review (Dillon, 2025) to an intentional, interactive tool for authentic communication (Nunan, 1991; Gangone, 2024).
-The "Heartbeat" of Interaction: Serves as the core driver shaping the quality and quantity of student participation (Walsh, 2011).
-Dual Function: Scaffolds language production while stimulating higher-order cognitive processing (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Hou et al., 2025).
-Adaptive Nature: Functions as an adaptive process where teachers tailor prompts to learner proficiency, bridging instructional goals and student engagement (Ellis, 2012; He, 2025).

EFL Teacher Questioning Strategies

-Temporal & Affective Strategies: Wait Time (Zhou, 2024; Oussama, 2025), Delivery & Tone (Krashen's Affective Filter, 1982; Maybery & Hartle, 2003).
-Structural & Linguistic Prompts: Sequenced Scaffolding (Wragg & Brown, 2001), Indirect Prompts (Darong, 2022; Lu & Zheng, 2025).
-Question Types & Typologies: Closed / Display Questions (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Laoli, 2025), Open-ended / Referential Questions (Candilasa, 2025).
-Advanced Pedagogical Approaches: Socratic Method & Probing (Lu & Zheng, 2025), Learner Autonomy (Rothstein & Santana, 2011; Laoli, 2024).

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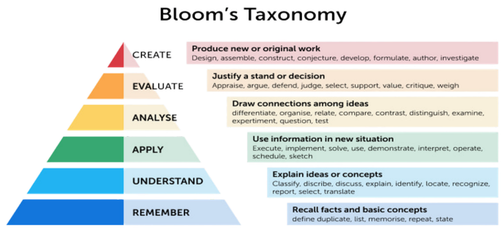
Theoretical Framework

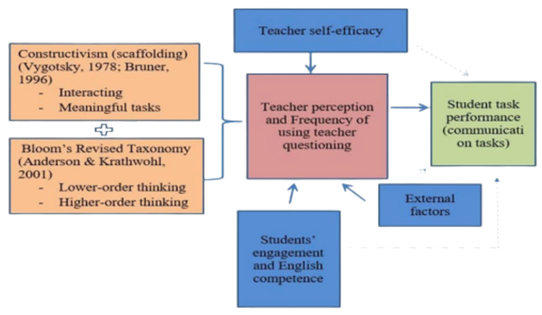


Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS):
Focus on recall, paraphrasing, and structural application (e.g., sentence transformation). Serve as "confidence builders" for basic language mechanics (Darong, 2022; Tee et al., 2010).

Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS):
Require problem-solving, analytical thinking, and personal opinion expression, essential for communicative competence (Lu & Zheng, 2025; Putri & Trisanti, 2025).

Core Synergy:
Strategic balance between LOTS and HOTS within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) bridges basic knowledge and complex communicative output (Walsh, 2011).

The Framework Diagram



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OBJECTIVES

Globally, effective teaching depends not only on the curriculum and instructional materials but also on pedagogical practices, particularly teacher questioning. Recent research in EFL contexts has consistently highlighted the essential role of teacher questioning in promoting student engagement and cognitive development (Rimmer, 2019; Saswati, 2022). As Walsh (2011) argues, teachers' language use, particularly strategic questioning, plays a crucial role in creating "space for learning" and fostering interactional competence in the classroom. Numerous studies (e.g., He, 2025; Lu & Zheng, 2025; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Walsh, 2011; Zhou, 2024) have identified teacher questioning as a fundamental pedagogical tool that facilitates classroom interaction and learning. In the Vietnamese educational context, previous studies have examined various aspects of teacher questioning (Dinh & Le, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Tran & Nguyen, 2021). These studies suggest that students' fear of making mistakes, concerns about pronunciation, and negative feedback from peers or teachers may reduce classroom participation, leading to limited language use, increased anxiety, and a greater reliance on Vietnamese and lower-order thinking skills (LOTS). Moreover, previous research has mainly focused on specific dimensions of teacher questioning, such as questioning techniques (Tran & Nguyen, 2021), the integration of questioning into digital learning materials, and the role of questioning in reading instruction (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023). Consequently, empirical evidence on teacher questioning practices in EFL classrooms, particularly in rural high school contexts, and their influence on student learning remains limited. Therefore, further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of how teacher questioning is implemented in specific regional contexts such as Dong Thap Province. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the use of teacher questioning by EFL high school teachers in public schools in Dong Thap and their perceptions regarding this field. This research was driven by two research questions: 1) What are EFL teachers' perceptions of using teacher questioning during classroom instruction in Dong Thap high schools? 2) What are EFL teachers' practices of teacher questioning during classroom instruction in Dong Thap high schools?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Quantitative: The questionaire including 3 clusters (30 items) was distributed to high school English teachers via the Google Forms

Table 1

Summary of the participants' demographic information (N= 122), based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970)

Participants' information	Variables	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	35	28.7%
	Female	87	71.3%
Degrees	Bachelor	105	86.1%
	Master	17	13.9%
Teaching Experience (years)	Under 5	25	20.5%
	5-10	14	11.5%
	11-15	12	9.8%
	16-20	22	18%
	Over 20	49	40.2%
Working context	Wards	63	51.6%
	Communes	59	48.4%

Table 2

Structure of the Official Questionnaire

Demographic information: Aims to identify participants' information about gender, teaching experience, and their teaching context

Clusters	Descriptions
Clusters 1	Aims at examining the teachers' perception of teacher questioning based on Bloom' taxonomy. This cluster includes 10 items (from item 1 to item 10).
Clusters 2	Identifies self-reported instructional practices and how often different types of questions are used in the EFL classroom. This cluster consists of 10 items (from item 11 to 20).
Clusters 3	Aims to explore the perceived benefits of effective questioning, along with the systemic challenges that teachers face in implementing it. This cluster has 10 items (from item 21 to item 30).

FINDINGS

Teachers' perceptions of using teacher questioning (using SPSS)

The results of the cluster 1 of the questionnaire revealed a high level of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha reaching 0.923 (highly reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis).

Table 3

Item-total correlation (A) and Cronbach's alpha (B) resulting from item deletion of cluster 1

Items	A	B	Items	A	B
1	.579	.923	6	.747	.913
2	.773	.911	7	.782	.911
3	.705	.915	8	.758	.912
4	.721	.914	9	.781	.911
5	.521	.927	10	.771	.911

Table 4

Teachers' understanding of using teacher questioning in class

Items	Mean	SD	Items	Mean	SD
1	4.19	.96	6	4.15	.80
2	4.27	.82	7	4.34	.78
3	4.27	.86	8	4.33	.82
4	4.16	.83	9	4.27	.84
5	3.66	.98	10	4.26	.83

The findings indicate that participants held positive perceptions of teacher questioning, particularly in terms of their role in enhancing student engagement, promoting higher-order thinking, and improving instructional effectiveness. However, some uncertainty remains regarding the use of different question types.

The practice of teacher questioning in the classroom

Similarly, the researcher conducted the SPSS-based reliability analysis for Cluster 2

To check whether any individual items were redundant or should be removed to improve the overall reliability of the scale, the "Item–Total Statistics" output was analyzed.

Table 5

Item-total correlation (A) and Cronbach's alpha (B) resulting from item deletion of cluster 2 (N=122)

Item	A	B	Item	A	B
11	.471	.773	16	.618	.755
12	.225	.800	17	.629	.750
13	.297	.793	18	.544	.763
14	.239	.801	19	.478	.771
15	.528	.765	20	.637	.751

As shown in Table 4, most items demonstrated acceptable item–total correlation coefficients, ranging from .471 to .637. However, several items, including Item 12 (r = .225), Item 13 (r = .297), and Item 14 (r = .239) exhibited low item–total correlations below the acceptable threshold of .30, suggesting that these items may not strongly connect with the overall construct of cluster 2. Thus, Item 12, 13, and 14 were deleted and the reliability test was run again.

Table 6

Item-total correlation (A) and Cronbach's alpha (B) resulting from item deletion of cluster 2 after deleting item 12,13,14 (N=122)

Item	A	B
11	.390	.824
15	.575	.797
16	.627	.789
17	.657	.782
18	.598	.793
19	.482	.812
20	.625	.789

The result shows that after deleting those items, the remaining items demonstrated acceptable item–total correlation coefficients, ranging from .390 to .657. The Cronbach's alpha was .823. This suggests that the rest of items in cluster 2 are reliable for further analysis.

Table 7

The practice of teacher questioning in class (N=122)

Item	Mean	SD
11	3.96	.54
15	3.83	.71
16	4.15	.63
17	3.54	.78
18	3.82	.68
19	3.90	.64
20	3.97	.67

The findings indicate that participants demonstrated a generally positive orientation toward the use of questioning strategies, particularly in promoting higher-order thinking and supporting student engagement. However, some strategies, such as the use of probing questions during communicative activities, were less consistently applied.

Perceived use of teacher questioning on students' task performance

A reliability analysis of the questionnaire scale for Cluster 3 was conducted, and the results indicated a good level of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha reaching approximately 0.844.

Table 8

Item-total correlation (A) and Cronbach's alpha (B) resulting from item deletion of cluster 3 (N=122)

Item	A	B	Item	A	B
21	.472	.835	26	.683	.816
22	.401	.844	27	.581	.825
23	.547	.830	28	.615	.822
24	.499	.833	29	.640	.820
25	.432	.841	30	.599	.824

As presented in Table 7, all items demonstrated acceptable to strong corrected item–total correlations, ranging from .401 to .683. This indicates that each item is positively correlated with the overall scale and contributes meaningfully to the construct of cluster 3. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha values if any item were deleted ranged from .816 to .844. Therefore, all items are considered necessary for further analysis.

Table 9

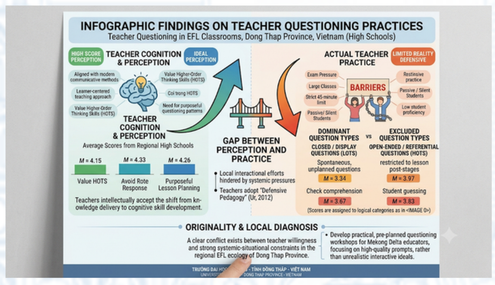
Perceived benefits and challenges of teacher questioning in classroom practice (N=122)

Items	Mean	SD	Items	Mean	SD
21	4.17	.83	26	3.67	.94
22	3.34	1.06	27	3.95	.98
23	4.11	.73	28	3.37	1.10
24	4.21	.79	29	3.84	.95
25	3.42	1.09	30	3.84	.89

In a word, the findings suggest that while participants recognized the positive role of teacher questioning in promoting interaction and engagement, they also faced several practical challenges. And, they choose the safe solution which focuses on asking to check students whether they understand the task and the content of the lesson only.

DISCUSSION

- RQ1: Progressive Cognitions & Theoretical Alignment
High Awareness: Teachers hold highly progressive beliefs about questioning as a strategic tool (M = 4.26), strongly aligning with MOET, 2018 and modern communicative pedagogy (He, 2025; Lu & Zheng, 2025).
Value of HOTS: High agreement that HOTS prompts encourage complex elaboration (M = 4.15) and prevent rote responses (M = 4.33)
- RQ2: The "Perception–Practice Gap" & Systemic Barriers
Instructional Reality: Despite high beliefs, HOTS are largely confined to post-reading stages (M = 3.97). Teachers rely heavily on spontaneous (M = 3.83) and LOTS display questions, supporting Farrell & Bennis's (2013) framework on cognitions vs. practices.
Defensive Pedagogy: Lower confidence in prompting critical analysis (M = 3.34) and student guessing (M = 3.67) force teachers into display IRF routines (Chin, 2007; Phuong & Nguyen, 2017) to maintain class control and pace.
- Challenges:
Time & Size: Large classes and strict 45-minute limits (M = 3.95) make extended wait-time (Ur, 2012; Walsh, 2011) a risky luxury (M = 3.42).
Passive Dynamics: Student silence and low proficiency (M = 3.84) drive teachers toward basic comprehension checks.



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Contextual Contribution: Provides quantitative diagnosis of the perception-practice gap in high schools across Dong Thap Province, echoing regional findings (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Tran & Nguyen, 2021).
Key Insight: Extends Walsh (2011) by proving the gap stems not from a lack of teacher willingness, but from severe institutional-ecological constraints.
Actionable Outcome: Call for practical, pre-planned questioning workshops for Mekong Delta educators under the 2018 Curriculum, moving away from unrealistic interactive ideals.

SCAN ME