

Impact of Referential Questions on Students' Oral Participation and Academic Performance in English

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Abstract: Referential questions are designed to elicit open-ended responses, allowing students to express their understanding in a way that is meaningful to them. This paper aims to investigate the impact of the teachers' use of referential questions on the students' oral participation and academic performance in an English class. Using quasi-experimental research design, the study investigated the Grade 10 students' level of oral participation in terms of frequency and fluency. It used a researcher-made oral participation rubric and class records as instruments in gathering the necessary data. Results of the study revealed that there was an improvement in the student's oral participation after the teacher's consistent use of referential questions. Additionally, an increased in the students' grades in English was also seen in the class record after one grading period of using referential questions in the classroom. Finally, the statistical data showed a positive relationship between the students' frequency of oral participation and academic performance in English but no direct correlation between the quality of their oral participation and their academic performance in English. This study recommends teachers incorporate referential questions regularly in English classes to enhance students' oral participation and engagement.

Keywords— Academic performance, English, oral participation, referential questions

1. INTRODUCTION (Heading 1)

Classroom questioning is a fundamental pedagogical tool that stimulates student engagement, critical thinking, and language proficiency. Among the types of questions teachers use, referential questions—those that elicit genuine responses and personal opinions rather than fixed answers—are believed to significantly influence student interaction. Referential questions have a great impact on the way students adapt information that is presented and discussed in the classroom, and more importantly, it fosters student's ability to process the world in a wider and bigger perspective. This ability to process information from diverse perspectives is crucial, particularly in language learning environments where students not only acquire linguistic skills but also develop the cognitive and social capabilities necessary to communicate effectively.

Previous researchers (Alghamdy, 2023; Astrid et al., 2019) claimed that the use of effective questioning techniques has been associated with improved academic performance, as it enables students to reinforce comprehension and retain information more effectively. When students are prompted to analyze, evaluate, and express their thoughts, they engage in deeper cognitive processing, which can lead to better understanding and retention of the material. This interaction not only enhances language proficiency but also builds students' confidence in their communication abilities, empowering them to express their views more openly and accurately (Banuag, 2022; Trila & Anwar, 2019).

In the Philippine educational setting, questioning strategies in the classroom are viewed as essential tools by teachers. Lingan et al. (2019) found a strong correlation between the

teachers' use of effective questioning and students' academic performance. Meanwhile, Giosop and Lumapinet (2023) analyzed the types of questions that teachers used in the Philippine classrooms and found that teachers employ referential questioning techniques as their questions encourage students to elaborate on their knowledge, share their learning experiences, and provide examples from their own perspectives. However, the present study discovered that the research gap lies on the limited studies exploring the direct impact of referential questioning on specific student outcomes, such as the quality and frequency of students' oral participation and academic performance in English. This study aims to address these gaps by exploring how referential questioning can be optimized to improve these skills, particularly in a multilingual and multicultural classroom such as in the Philippines.

In particular, this study answered the following questions:

1. What are the student's levels of oral participation in an English class before and after exposure to referential questions?
2. What are the students' academic performance in English before and after exposure to referential questions?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the students' levels of oral participation and their academic performance in English?

2. METHODOLOGY

A quasi-experimental design is a research approach that aims to examine the effect of an intervention or treatment without random assignment of participants to control and experimental groups. Unlike true experiments, which randomly assign participants to different conditions, quasi-

experiments use naturally occurring groups, making them practical for educational settings where random assignment can be challenging. In this study, the quasi-experimental research was carried out among the two heterogeneous sections of Grade 10 students in one public school in the City of Valencia, Bukidnon.

The study was conducted in one national high school in the City of Valencia, Bukidnon. At present, the school, has 676 enrollees, 14 classrooms, 1 H.E room, 2 computer laboratories, and 23 teachers. It has four sections in grades 7-8 and three sections in grades 9-10. It also has additional buildings and laboratories in preparation for the school's offering of courses for the senior high school classes. The sectioning of all grade levels in this school is mixed or heterogeneous sectioning.

The participants in this study were 88 Grade 10 students (two sections) from a high school in Valencia, Bukidnon. Among these students, 48 were female, and 40 were male, with most students ranging in age from 14 to 15. A few students, specifically five PEPT passers, were older, aged between 17 and 19. The majority of the students' parents work as farmers or tenants in rice paddies, with only a small number of parents employed in private offices or owning a business. In Grade 10, this high school has four sections, where heterogeneous sectioning is used. Most students in the school reside within the barangay where the school is located or in neighboring barangays.

This study employed an oral participation rubric designed by the researcher which underwent content validity from a panel of experts. It was used to assess students' levels of oral participation—specifically, the frequency and quality of their responses—both before and after exposure to referential questions. Additionally, the teacher's class record served as a secondary instrument, providing a basis for measuring students' academic performance in English before and after the implementation of referential questioning techniques.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Levels of Oral Participation

Table 1 reflects the results of the student's levels of oral participation in terms of frequency before and after one grading period.

Table 1 illustrates that before the intervention, the students' frequency of oral participation belongs to the "Never" level in which the mean of their scores is only 1.47. This further illustrates that out of 88 respondents, more than half of them participated at least only once in every discussion. Also, 10 students were considered missing because they were absent in the class or present but chose not to participate in any of the discussions. On the contrary, the frequency of their participation when the teacher already used referential questions in the classroom is different. It can be noted that those who were considered missing in the previous sessions already participated during the intervention phase for one grading period. Furthermore, it can be observed that the percentage of those who belong to the "Never" level has

decreased for two-thirds of the class already belongs to the "Seldom" level.

Table 1

Students' Level of Oral Participation in Terms of Frequency

Levels	Before		After	
	N	%	N	%
Never	49	55.7	31	35.2
Seldom	27	30.7	52	59.1
Sometimes	2	13.6	2	2.3
Always			3	3.4
Total	78	100	88	100
Mean	1.47		2.00	
Levels	Never		Seldom	

Results of the study indicate that majority of the students do not engage in oral participation before the teacher's use of referential questions. Operating on the belief that the quantity of students' response is associated with learning, then the result is a negative indicator of what the students have gained in the discussion. The result is in accord with the idea of Azeez (2023) and Wonder (2021) who posited that oral participation provides teachers with feedback as to the extent of the students' understanding or comprehension of the lesson. So, when students do not fully comprehend the lesson, the teacher's questions will just be met with silence and reticence. The students cannot simply give or impart what they do not have. Most of the time, the students' non-participatory and passive behavior create a frustrating classroom especially for the teacher who wants to meet the goals of the lesson.

Thus, the result can be an evaluative tool for teachers to reflect on how well they have conducted the lesson and or how extensive are their means of eliciting responses from the students. Learning may vary from one educational environment to another and from one learner to another, nonetheless, the main goal of every classroom discussion should be to increase the students' involvement in the different forms of verbal activity (Puno, 2021).

Meanwhile, Table 2 shows the students' quality of oral participation before and after one grading period.

Table 2

Students' Level of Oral Participation in Terms of Quality

Levels	Before		After	
	N	%	N	%
Unacceptable	0			
Developing	61	69.3	65	73.9
Proficient	17	19.3	22	25
Exemplary	0		1	1.1
Missing	10	11.4		
Total	78	100	88	100
Mean	2.27		2.39	
Levels	Developing		Developing	

The table illustrates that before the intervention period the mean of the students' scores is 2.27 which could be classified as "developing." Based on the rubric, this means that more than half of the class answered with single, isolated words or memorized phrases. Also, no student belongs to the "unacceptable" and "exemplary" levels based on the scores given by the raters. Although the quality of their answers did not belong to the "unacceptable" level, yet no answers were rated as "exemplary." This result implies that no student could consistently respond in multiple complete sentences. The raters even noticed that some students would write their answers first in their papers and read it during recitation. The same observation was also seen by Trila and Anwar (2020) who noted that one of the strategies used by students in answering questions is through writing them down first and then reading them later. By doing this, students become more confident when answering the teacher's questions.

The findings could be an indicator that respondents did not have a good command of the language and or they could not think and speak at the same time using the English language. Santos et al. (2022) termed it as "limited proficiency" or the low ability to speak the second language which usually results in students' insecurity and self-consciousness to speak in front of classmates and peers. Indeed, orally producing multiple complete sentences is a problem for many students most especially those who belong to the lower level classes. As observed by Ozaki (2021) speaking in class is a difficulty commonly faced by ESL and EFL students which could be attributed to several factors.

After the intervention period, the mean increased to 2.39, but the quality of their answers belongs to the developing level because the difference between the two means is only 0.12 which is not enough to qualify them to the next level. However, it is important to note that this study was done only for one grading period, which might not be enough for the students to enhance their speaking and participation skills.

Looking at both the frequency and quality of involvement of the participants, it could be noted that they were not into participating in oral discussions in the class. It could be attributed to their low English competence which, according

to Pontillas (2021), is the primary factor that hampers students' participation.

The same observation was made by Rayla and Sonsona (2021) on the participation level of students. According to them, when the oral production involves the use of a language which is not their mother tongue, it causes a debilitating anxiety that students assume an avoidance attitude and tend to break away from the task. It is particularly the case in the Philippine classrooms, where most students have bright ideas but could not express them in English. Thus, those who want to participate usually ask permission to express their thoughts in vernacular while others opt to keep quiet and be a passive observer of the discussion. The students' limited vocabularies in English which is a language they do not commonly use at home, restrain them from sharing their thoughts and asking questions and clarifications.

Another reason for their lower participation level is that during this phase, the majority of the questions asked by the teacher requires only one concrete answer thus, students did not have an opportunity to share more other than what was expected of them (Shanmugavelu et al., 2020). Students' opinions or ideas regarding the topic were not asked, thus they see no need to impart them to the class.

The result also supports the claim of Azeez (2023) that students in EFL classes were least likely to participate in an oral activity because of the type of questions the teacher asks. So, if teachers ask only for the "what" and the "how" of the reading text, students would only look for the answers in the material and do not bother to expand or elaborate their answers. However, if teachers try to engage more the students by asking them questions such as, "why do think..?" or "If you were, ..." they would be propelled to think and give reasons as they see it fit to the situation. This way their levels of engagement increase and they would not be highly dependent on the words of reading material.

The same was found to be true by Bulling and Guzman (2020) who explained that the use of questions is indeed a controlling factor that engages students' attention in producing comprehensible verbal responses. A large part of students' exposure to oral participation and other forms of interaction happens at school; thus, they acquire the vast proficiency of their ability to express by observing and or copying the people whom they judge to be more expert than them. Usually, it is the teacher whom the students view as the "fountain of knowledge" in the classroom. Therefore, the teacher's types of discourse especially in asking questions largely affect the students' type of discourse.

Students' Academic Performance in English

Table 3 displays the students' academic performance in English before and after their exposure to referential questions.

Table 3
Students' Academic Performance in English Before and After the Use of Referential Questions

Descriptors	Before		After	
	n	%	n	%
Advanced	0		2	2.7
Proficient	9	10.2	18	20.4
Approaching proficiency	37	42.1	32	36.6
Developing	29	32.9	31	34.9
Beginning	13	14.8	5	5.4
Total	88	100 %	88	100 %
Mean	79.44		80.61	
Std. Deviation	4.46		4.52	
Descriptor	Developing		Approaching Proficiency	

As illustrated, the mean of their grades is only 79.44 which implies that most of them have grades a little below or a little higher than 79. Based on the descriptors of the Department of Education, before the intervention was made less than half of the class belongs to the “approaching proficiency” level and more than a quarter belongs to the “Developing.” Furthermore, no students have grades that are on the “advanced” level and only a very few also belongs to the “beginning” which explains why the standard deviation is only 4.46. It implies that the students’ academic performance was not scattered or distributed extremely far from the mean. The standard deviation clearly reflects that the students’ grades in English are just a little bit higher than the passing rate of 75.

After the intervention period, the students’ academic performance increased for the mean is already 80.61 and the standard deviation has also increased by 0.06 which means that their grades are already scattered far from the mean. It implies that some of the students have grades far from 80. There are two of them who have a grade of 90 while others have 88 and 85. As can be seen in the table, the number of students who belong to the “proficient” level has increased while those who belong to the “approaching proficiency” decreased. Those who belong to the “beginning” level decreased by almost half as the number of those in the “developing” level increases.

However, there are a few participants whose grades are the same before and after the intervention. This result does not come as a surprise because academic performance is a multi-faceted construct with different domains and oral participation is just one part (Calixtro, 2022). For example, one factor that may have contributed to the increase of students’ grades during this period were the extra points given

by their English teacher because they joined the debate competition as part of their extra- curricular activities.

Aside from extra-curricular activities, there are other factors that could contribute to the increase or decrease of the students’ academic performance. According to Nicolas (2022) it may involve family background, teachers, and the students themselves. The combinations of these three causal factors determine how a student performs in the classroom. However, these factors may vary from one learner to another and from one academic and cultural setting to another.

Relationship Between Students’ Oral Participation and Academic Performance in English

Table 4 presents the relationship between oral participation regarding frequency and quality of answers to students’ academic performance in English.

Table 4

Correlation of Oral Participation and Academic Performance

Variables	Pearson R-Value	P-Value
Frequency	-0.59	.001**
Quality	-0.34	1 Ns

****Significant at $p < 0.05$ level**

ns= not significant

The table shows that frequency of involvement has a significant linear relationship with academic performance with $r = -0.59$ and p-value of 0.001. Based on result, the second null hypothesis of this study should be rejected. On the other hand, the quality of students’ oral participation showed a value of $r = -0.34$ and p-value of 1, which is not significant at 0.05 level. It means that the quality of students’ oral participation does not have a direct relationship on the students’ academic performance in English.

However, it should be noted that although the students’ scores in the quality of their answers after the intervention period were not enough to qualify them to the next level which is “Proficient” nor enough to directly affect their academic performance in English, still it is noticeable that the mean of their scores before and after exposure to referential questions has a difference. It simply showed that their scores after the intervention increased which is an indicator of their improved performance.

The results further imply that those students who participated more and had a good quality of responses have higher grades in English. The data support the claim of that students who have been found to earn higher grades as their participation increases. It is because, through constant oral interaction, students learn to adapt the right skills, concepts, and knowledge that are useful in improving the other components of academic performance such as exams and other co-curricular factors. In fact, in schools where oral

participation is not graded, students still feel the need to participate in the discussions believing that it would be a tool for them to improve their academic performance.

The result is also in accord with Ekvall and Seif (2021) who observed that the students who were actively involved in the classroom discussion were reported to have higher rates and scores in exams.

The same result was confirmed in the findings of Bekkering and Ward (2021) who concluded that students with higher oral communication proficiency also have higher grades especially in subjects under the social sciences. It is because these are the subjects which usually give higher importance to effective communication. The inability to communicate effectively may lead to the dysfunction in the exchanging of ideas and opinions of the lessons and, therefore, affects comprehension and academic performance. In the same way, Atifnigar et al. (2022) found that low oral participation is correlated with low academic performance. Those students who are not interested to share their ideas, make queries, and ask questions are the same students who are not performing well in class and have low grades in the subject.

4. CONCLUSIONS

There is a change on the students' levels of oral participation after their exposure to referential questions. The students' levels of oral participation regarding their frequency and quality of their answers have improved and showed a significant difference after the teacher employed referential questions in the classroom discussions.

There is an improvement on the students' academic performance in English after their exposure to referential questions.

There is a positive relationship between the students' frequency of oral participation and academic performance in English but no direct correlation between the quality of their oral participation and their academic performance in English. Those students who have an increase in the frequency of oral participation also have an increase in their academic performance in English

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