IDENTIFICATIONS OF FACTORS BARRING STUDENTS FROM ASKING LECTURER AND THEIR SUBSTITUTE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aimed to uncover the factors contributing to the Mahakarya Asia University students' hesitance to ask questions to the lecturer in their English class and the alternative learning strategies they employed to acquire information and clarify their doubts. Using observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, the research discovered that students' reluctance to ask questions was attributed to the fear of making a wrongly structured question, appearing unlettered after asking, and talking in front of other people; preference to ask questions in writing; and confusion about how and what to ask. In exchange of not asking questions, students employed substitute strategies such as exploring the internet, discussions with peers, and revisiting study materials. This finding reveals the deterrence to students' questioning during class and how they made up for the knowledge they did not obtain by asking. Future research may benefit from this research by confirming or confronting this research and finding working solutions to the problems mentioned or discovered.

Keywords: Discouraging Factors To Asking Questions, Substitute Learning Strategies, Searching The Internet, Discussion, Reading Modules. DOI: https://doi.org/10.31943/wej.v7i2.225

INTRODUCTION

Usually, students ask questions when they discover a gap or discrepancy in their knowledge or desire to expand their knowledge (Almeida, 2011, p. 635). Since millennia ago, students have been asking questions to their teachers, as evidenced by Confucius answering his disciples' questions (Eno, 2015). Johar and Lanum (2021) also add that students may start asking question when they are engaged in a discussion, encountering problems, doing an inquiry-based activity, and others (p. 85).

Countless researches and observations on numerous advantages of student questions have been confirmed. Some of them are students becoming more engaged, claiming ownership of their learning, and producing higher-quality work (Schwartz, 2012; Krasny, 2012, 2:10). Students also perceive their peers asking questions as helpful, clarifying thinking, providing alternative perspectives, and breaking the monotony of lectures (Nadile et al., 2021, pp. 9-10). Asking questions also triggers interest, diagnoses learning difficulties, encourages critical thinking and opinions, measures learning outcomes, eliminating doubts, and

indicates active learning (Hariyadi, 2014, pp. 149-151; Haryati, 2018, p. 104). Additionally, asking questions reveals more information than answering it (Heick, 2020).

In the modern, student-centered classroom, student questions play a vital role as it is part of teacher-student interaction. Understanding the significance and advantages of student questions, the Indonesian government has implemented strategies to address this issue. For example, the "scientific approach" teaching-learning procedures in the older *Kurikulum* 2013 emphasize the importance of student questioning (Suyanto, 2017, p. 100008-2). A few years later after the making of *Kurikulum* 2013, the encouragement for students' questioning is also accommodated in the newly developed code-of-conduct for Indonesian students, the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile). Nadiem Makarim, the Indonesian minister of education, explained that practicing the *Profile Pelajar Pancasila* neans the teachers and students have to ask a lot of questions, perform a lot of tries, and produce a lot of works (Adit, 2020).

Unfortunately, it is common to see a class producing no or a few questions (Hariyadi, 2014, pp. 143-144). Various factors contribute to this, including fear of negative evaluation, anxiety, and insufficient knowledge about the subject (Nadile et al., 2021, p. 18; Hermawan et al., 2014, p. 2). Shyness, insecurity, and fear of disturbing others also hinder students from asking questions (Lind et al., 2016, p. 2; Hardianty M., 2017, pp. 62-63).

The third semester students of the English class of Mahakarya Asia University who frequently asked questions were the minority. Intending to rectify this unideal situation, the lecturer allocated a special session for students if they wanted to ask question, in addition to allow the students to interrupt the flow of the lecture to ask question. Initially, the lecturer believed the conditions would improve after the students already got used to their new environment. A few weeks later, although improvement indeed occurred, the progress was terribly abysmal. Thus, this research was conducted to identify factors discouraging the students to ask questions and what learning strategies the students implemented to obtain answers to the questions they did not ask.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach and used a case study design. The selection of the qualitative approach, in which one its purposes is, according to Croswell, "to understand the participants' point of view of the events, situation and action that they give about their lives and experiences" (Olbata & Ndun, 2021, p. 18), serves the purpose of this research, which is to identify the reasons students did not ask questions during class and their substitute strategies to obtain the information.

Respondents

For the purpose of this research, 24 third-semester students of the *akuntansi* (accounting), *arsitektur* (architecture), *kewirausahaan* (entrepreneurship), *manajemen* (management), *sains informasi geografi* (geographic information science), and *teknik industri* (industrial engineering) departments of Mahakarya Asia University were selected. The considerations for their candidacy were their English class enrolment and low participation in asking questions to the lecturer during the class. Those students were offered an additional score if they were

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willing to join the research. The researchers also promised that no repercussions would be made on them should they not enlist their participation. Out of 27 candidates, 24 agreed to cooperate. Those 24 students, through questionnaires and interviews, acknowledged that they had some incomprehension during class but decided to abandon their right to ask to the lecturer or only use it in a very rare occasion.

Instruments

Data was collected using the instruments of observation, questionnaires, and interviews. The observation was performed to see whether students really stayed silent during class. The points of the five-item questionnaire were to explore the factors that hindered the students from asking questions to the lecturer during class and the learning strategies they selected to deal with the loss of opportunities to ask the lecturer. The questionnaire was written in Indonesian to mitigate potential issues of incomprehension or misunderstanding among the participants. A semi-structured interview, also conducted in Indonesian to ensure greater comprehension and more valid responses, was conducted to verify the students' perspectives of their own reasons and the learning strategies of their choice and explore deeper into their answers.

Procedures

Having collected and studied some related literature, the researchers set their eyes on finding the participants of the research. The researchers decided to invite all the students who rarely or never asked questions to the teachers during class instead of selecting some as representatives. The threshold of the questionasking frequency was set to one question per month, meaning that students who asked one question per month or fewer would be approached to join the research.

With the requirement set up, the researchers checked the students' academic list that the lecturer had made to monitor the student's academic progress. From the list, it was identified that 22 students never asked a single question to the lecturer during in the first three months of the semester while the remaining five asked questions to the lecturer one or two times during the three months of class.

The researchers decided to conduct a one-time observation in the class to verify the data concluded from the students' academic lists. During class, the two researchers noticed that 26 students in the list did not ask any questions to the lecturer and one was absent. Those students, including the one who had been absent during the observation, were contacted and asked whether they would join the research. A small addition of the score was promised to those who accepted the request and no penalty in any form would be imposed for non-participation. Such compensation does not violate research ethics and is a common practice in some institutions such University of Toronto (Zand, n.d.), the University of Oxford (Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), 2020, pp. 3-4), and the University of California, Berkeley (Committee for Protection of Human Subjects, 2022) under certain conditions.

The questionnaires were distributed and the data from the questionnaires analyzed before a framework for a semi-structured interview was designed. The data obtained during the interview was used to corroborate, verify, and explicate the results of the questionnaires.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Believing that one person may have multiple reasons for not asking a question, as well as learning strategies, the researchers allowed the students to select more than one factor they deemed influential to their refraining from asking a question and their substitute learning strategies. However, the students were strongly encouraged to select only one most dominant reason and learning strategy if possible for the sake of the optimization of data analysis.

Similar responses collected from the questionnaire were grouped for easier and better analysis. For example, searching answers from YouTube and some other sites were all classified into "searching answers from internet" due to the similar natures of those answers. Differences would be considered and analyzed if necessary.

The final data analysis from questionnaire showed that slightly than half of the participants, 14 students, came out with one reason, seven other students listed two reasons, and the remaining three students said they had three issues. For learning strategies, 12 students presented one strategy, another 12 students selected two strategies, and only three students picked three strategies. Table 1 lists the students, their issues, and strategies they utilized to solve their problems.

	Factors			Strategies		
Student 1	SQ			SI	DF	
Student 2	SQ	SA	DL	SI	DF	RM
Student 3	ST	DL		SI		
Student 4	SQ			DF		
Student 5	LM			DF	RM	
Student 6	SQ			SI	DF	
Student 7	SQ	ST		SI		
Student 8	ST			SI		
Student 9	SQ	SA		DF		
Student 10	SA			SI	RM	
Student 11	SQ	SA		SI	DF	
Student 12	SA			SI	DF	
Student 13	SQ			DF		
Student 14	SQ	DL		SI		
Student 15	SA			SI	RM	
Student 16	SA			SI	DF	RM
Student 17	DL			SI	DF	
Student 18	DL			SI		
Student 19	SQ	SA	ST	SI	RM	
Student 20	SA			SI		
Student 21	SQ	SA	LM	RM		
Student 22	ST	DL		SI		
Student 23	DL			SI	DF	RM
Student 24	SQ	DL		SI		

Table 1. Students' factors for not asking and their strategies

Information

SA

- SQ : Shy/afraid of asking using wrong questions/sentences.
 - : Shy/afraid of appearing unlettered.
- ST : Shy/afraid of talking in public.
- DL : Distance learning method is preferred.
- LM : Lack of mastery of content.
- SI : Search answers from internet.
- DF : Discuss with friends/others.
- RM : Reread modules/textbooks.

The analysis of the collected questionnaire and interview data revealed that the primary reason hindering students from asking questions during class was the feeling of shyness, fear, or discomfort. Out of 24 students, 16 claimed that such feelings prevented them from approaching the lecturer with their queries. The reasons for these feelings varied among the students. Twelve out of the 16 students were hesitant to ask questions due to their lack of confidence in formulating appropriate queries. Since it was an English class, communication should be in English. Accordingly, their doubt on their own English language skills to compose accurate and grammatically correct questions means they had no tools to convey their questions.

Another common reason for shyness was the fear of appearing ignorant by asking questions that others might already know the answers to. This factor deterred ten students from seeking clarification from the lecturer during class. Additionally, five students blamed their shyness to speak in front of their peers on their innate personalities. Consequently, when they encountered difficulties understanding the lecture, they did not consider requesting assistance from the lecturer, as it would require speaking in front of their classmates.

During further exploration of these reasons, the researchers discovered that when asking questions, students felt shy not only towards their classmates but also towards the lecturer and other individuals present. They believed that their environment lacked the necessary support for asking questions without the risk of being ridiculed by their peers. This aligns with Prilanita and Sukirno's (2017) research, which highlights the significance of peer acceptance in creating a positive classroom atmosphere and fostering confidence (p. 252).

The researchers were concerned about the extensive number of students who believed their classroom was an unsupportive environment. Considering that they were already in their third semester, it was expected that they would have had sufficient time to familiarize themselves with the class and create a supportive atmosphere. However, after conducting interviews, it became evident that the issue stemmed from the COVID-19 restrictions. The nationwide lockdown starting from March 2020 forced educational institutions to transition to distance learning, limiting direct interactions. As a result, the students only interacted with their classmates virtually most of the time and lacked the opportunity to build strong relationships. Worse, before the English class, which consisted of students of six different departments, namely accounting, architecture, entrepreneurship, management, geographic information science, and industrial engineering, students of one particular department even had had no interaction with students of other departments and only in rare chances they interacted outside the classroom. This created feelings of awkwardness (Cheema, 2021; Redaksi SKM Amanat, 2021; Yusuf, 2021; Hapsari, 2022), insecurity, and an unsupportive environment when they met during face-to-face classes.

The second most stated reason why students did not ask questions to the lecturer is their rather inflexible adaptation to the oral questioning method in faceto-face class. Those students were too comfortably accustomed to the questioning method they had utilized during the distance learning: asking question through writing with relatively no time limit and without interrupting the lecture. Students reasoned that asking questions to the lecturer might break the flow of the lecture if they raised their hands during explanation. They might wait until the question and answer session began but there were complications such as they had to share the remaining time with other students who also asked questions, the loss of mood for information inquiry, insufficient time to formulate a proper question, and in a rare chance, they forgot the questions. There were eight students belonging to this group.

Finally, two students admitted that they did not ask questions simply because they did not know what to ask. During the interview, it became clear that they had a very limited understanding of certain lessons, which hindered them from formulating appropriate questions. While it may seem surprising that learners struggle to identify what they do not understand and how to seek clarification, it is, in fact, a common phenomenon (Kardamis, 2017, Teach 4 the Heart's 44# podcast, 00:01:29-00:01:34).

To cope with deliberately missing their chances to ask a question during class to the lecturer, students came up with various learning strategies. According to Wu et al. (2021) who quoted Alexander et al. (1998), learning strategies are defined as "processes to obtain, organize, or transform information" (p. 2). The most adopted learning strategy, searching suitable answer from internet, was chosen by an overwhelming majority of the participants, 19 out of 24 respondents. Those 19 students said that googling was an option they use most of the time although they also had various different sites and methods to obtain the answers they needed, such as YouTube, Quora, and the new rising star of the internet, ChatGPT. Students took pleasure in how quickly and effortlessly internet gives them precise answers. Considering that nowadays internet is ubiquitous and searching and locating answers efficiently from internet is viewed as an important skill (Henry, 2006, p. 615), it is understandable why most of the participants resorted to this method.

The second most used learning strategy was consulting with other people, such as classmates and people whom they believe can help. They reasoned that discussion with people is enjoyable and lively, people offer enlightenment and clarify doubt, and in cases the students are unable to explain what or which part of the lesson they do not understand, the people they discuss with can guess correctly the problem based on indirect but related clues such as how they formulate their questions. Classmates were usually the first choice as they share the same classroom experiences. Moreover, they feel comfortable discussing with friends they know well and can use the event to socialize. Some of the students also by chance know people who are not their classmates but have better knowledge of

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English. For examples, one of them had a friend who enrolled in an English literature department. The students said they would gladly enlist those people's assistance. There were 12 students who held onto this option. Among those 12 students, none of those with fear of talking in public selected this method. The researchers did not have sufficient data to conclude whether this was purely coincidental or fear of talking in public also applies to discussion with friends.

The third learning strategy is (re)reading modules, notes, textbooks, presentations, and exercises used in the class or anything related to the class lessons. Eight students resorted to this option. They told the researchers that it was easier to find the answer they needed from those sources because the lessons imparted were taken from or, in the case of the related exercises, used those sources. Modules, notes, exercises, and presentations are limited to a certain topic discussed in class so it is easier to get the missing knowledge they were searching for. This is an advantage of a book, which discusses only one topic (SeeKeen, 2023) or related topics. All students selecting this option also elaborated on their other reasons while comparing this method to searching on the internet. They claimed they did not dislike searching on the internet, but such comparisons helped them explain their points better to the researchers. The first comparison was searching from related sources is somewhat less taxing compared to searching on the internet. Internet indeed offers relatively limitless pages of possible solutions, but the human brain may not be able to handle or regulate them all. This is what people call "information overload". Information overload, wrote Tunikova (2018), may result from the inability to control the overwhelming flow of incoming information and the lack of information quality control. Tunikova's article further explains that once people experience information overload, they may start to feel irritated, be unable to think clearly, suffer from the exhaustion of mind, be incapable of making even a minor decision, deplete willpower, trigger anxiety, be unable to focus and lose critical thinking skills. Thus, it is understandable that these students preferred reading textbooks than searching the internet. Exhaustion from searching on the internet for electronics may also appear. Jabr (2013), quoting Wästlund et al.'s (2005), writes, "[...] screen-based reading is more physically and mentally taxing than reading on paper". Naturally, students who read e-books, presentation files, or anything using electronic displays more or less do not enjoy this advantage.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study was planned and conducted to find out the reasons why a lot of Mahakarya Asia University students enrolling for English class do not ask questions in the class even if they do not understand the lesson and their learning strategies of choice to cope with the nonreceipt of knowledge. It was discovered that there are several factors that discourage those students from asking questions. Aside from having fear for making an inaccurate English question, appearing unknowledgeable if they ask a question, and/or talking in front of their classmates and lecturer, some students also do not adapt quickly to the oral questioning in a face-to-face class, favoring asking questions through writing because it offers no time limit and does not interrupt the lecture. Students may delay asking questions until the question and answer session commences, but they may need to share the limited time with other students who also ask questions, lose the mood to ask, not

have enough time to formulate a proper question, or even forget the question. The last discovered reason is students do not know what and how to ask.

The students squandered their opportunities to ask in class but they employed some learning strategies to make up for it. The most adapted learning strategy to find an answer without asking the lecturer directly in class is to search it on the internet by the means of search engines such as Google, artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT, and specific sites such as YouTube or Quora. Students enjoy the extensive availability of the internet which allows them to obtain a quick and accurate answer anytime they need it without much effort. Another learning strategy employed by the participants is a discussion with other people. People whom they discuss something with usually are relatively observative, informative, and affable. The third learning strategy is to consult the modules, notes, textbooks, presentations, and exercises that they use in class. Topic-focused and less taxing are the pros of this method.

Although this study has its limitations, for example, it does not verify whether the learning strategies employed by the students are indeed effective, the researchers hoped that this research will help educators to identify factors that inhibit students from asking and how the students deal with such deliberation of missing a chance to ask in class. Future researchers may avail themselves of this research by verifying the outcomes of this research, disputing this research and stating the reasons for differences, and finding proper solutions to the factors mentioned in this or another research.

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