# CHAPTER 4

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study in three sections. The first section reports and discusses question and questioning strategy types the four teachers employed in the classrooms. The second section examines types of questions and questioning strategies which elicited responses from the students as well as the length of the elicited responses. The last section presents and discusses factors affecting the absence of the students' responses to the teachers' questions.

## 4.1 Question and Questioning Strategy Types Used by Teachers

### 4.1.1 Question Types

Table 4.1 shows the types and number of questions asked by the four teachers in the classrooms.

**Table 4.1 Questions Used by Teachers**

| Question Type | | Questions | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number | Percentage |
| Epistemic | 1. Display questions | 157 | 56.27% |
| | 2. Referential questions | 104 | 37.28% |
| Echoic | 3. Confirmation checks | 10 | 3.58% |
| | 4. Clarification requests | 5 | 1.79% |
| | 5. Comprehension checks | 3 | 1.08% |
| Total | | 279 | 100% |

The results of the study presented in the table show that the teachers asked more epistemic questions than echoic questions during their teaching. Under epistemic questions, display questions were used the most frequently in the classrooms. This is consistent with the results of a number of studies which investigated teachers' use of questions in ESL and EFL classrooms and affirmed that display questions were the most frequently used in the language classroom (Long and Sato, 1983; Suvalee Chinkumtornwong, 1985; Sakorn Suasongsilp, 1990; Supatcharee Ekasingh, 1991; Alcon, 1993 and Chutima Thamaraksa, 1997). Display questions in the present study were found to have four essential roles: to test the students' grammatical and general knowledge, to have the students practise grammatical structure, to introduce a new topic in the lesson and to help students recall their learning experience.

As for referential questions, they followed display questions in frequency of occurrence and were found to have three crucial roles: to elicit students' opinions and general information concerning the topic of the lesson, to introduce a new topic of the lesson and to manage classroom activities. With respect to echoic questions, confirmation checks were used the most often. This was followed by clarification requests and comprehension checks respectively. All the echoic questions found in this study were found to perform the same functions as those reviewed in chapter 2 (Refer to 2.2 question classifications), that is, they function to direct information flow and negotiate interaction.

**Dominance of Display Questions in the Study**

This study found that display questions were more dominant in the first lesson than in the second lesson. The majority of display questions found in the first lesson functioned to test the students' grammatical knowledge which is about reported questions and to have the students practise grammatical structure, that is changing

actual questions into reported questions and *vice versa*. Display questions functioning to test the students' grammatical knowledge accounted for 68.04% of all display questions asked in the study and those functioning to have the students practise grammatical structure accounted for 24.84%. Referential questions, on the contrary, were employed far more frequently in the second lesson. Most referential questions asked in the second lesson functioned to elicit from the students their opinions and general information related to the topic of the lesson which was about environment. They accounted for 84.62% of all referential questions employed in the study. The following are examples of occurrences of display and referential questions found in this study. Examples 1 and 2 illustrate the occurrences of display questions and examples 3 and 4 illustrate the occurrences of referential questions. These examples are illustrated in italics in the lesson transcription extracts shown below:

**Example 1: Display questions functioning to test students' grammatical knowledge**

T:   *What should be the actual question?*

Ss:   Do you know anyone at the party?

T:   Do you know anyone here? {The teacher repeated the students'response.} and then in the text said "A guy asked me if I knew if I knew anyone at the party". {The teacher read the sentence in the text.}, *What is the difference?* Tense, tense is different. OK. *This is the present tense?*

Ss:   Past tense.

T:   Past tense past tense. *Why is past tense?*

Ss:   Because (Inaudible)

T:   Because it's in the reported question.

(Class C, lesson 1)

In example 1, the teacher asked the first question to test whether the students could change the reported question into an actual question. The second question

"What is the difference?" was asked to test if the students knew the difference between the actual question and the reported question. The teacher, however, answered the question herself. Then, she asked the third and fourth questions to test the students' recognition of tense and their understanding of the use of tense in the reported question.

### Example 2: Display questions functioning to have students practise grammatical structure

T: *...the students asked me what?*

Ss: what my name was.

T: How old are you? *The students asked me how old___*

Ss: how old I was.

T: how old I was. OK. Good. *They wanted to know___*

Ss: where I was from.

T: Right. OK. Where I was from.

(Class A, lesson 1)

In the above example, before the teacher asked the above questions to have the students practise changing actual questions into reported questions, she firstly presented the students three actual questions: "What is your name?", "How old are you?" and "Where are you from?". Then, the teacher asked the students to change the three actual questions into reported questions. Asking these questions made the students practise the grammatical structure they have learnt.

### Example 3: Referential questions functioning to get students' opinions

T: Yes, take a paper bag or plastic bag or take take (Inaudible) bag with you when you go shopping. *Why?*

Ss: To decrease garbage.

T: *How how to help save the environment if you have a shower instead of a bath?*

Ss: Save water.

(Class B, lesson 2)

Referential questions in example 3 elicited the students' opinions about how to help save the environment. The first question required the students' opinion as to why they took a plastic bag with them when they went shopping; and the second question, how the students would help save the environment if they had a shower instead of a bath.

**Example 4: Referential questions functioning to get general information from students**

T:   ... And then number 4, Don't throw any old bottles, take them to the bottle bank.

Ss:  Don't throw any old bottles, take them to the bottle bank.

T:  *Do you throw them in the garbage bag or you take them to the bottle bank to use again or to recycle?*

Ss:  In the garbage bag.

T:  O.K... *Do we have the bottle bank in Thailand?*

Ss:  [Silence]

T:  *What about in the campus?*

Ss:  No.

(Class B, lesson 2)

After asking the students to look at the suggestion to help save environment in the coursebook, the teacher asked the first question to get from the students information about whether they throw any old bottles. The second question was asked to get from the students general information about whether there was a bottle bank in Thailand. The students were silent after the teacher's question. Then, the teacher asked another question whether there was the bottle bank on the campus. This time, the students were able to answer the question.

In this study, it is possible that the topic and the objectives of the lesson contributed to the predominance of display questions in the first lesson and of referential questions in the second lesson. Since the topic of the first lesson was

concerned with grammatical structure, the teachers needed to review what the students had learnt in the last period and had them practise using the grammatical structure. Review and drill activities allowed the teachers an opportunity to ask questions that had the students display their grammatical knowledge and practise using the grammatical structure. This explains why the greatest number of questions in the first lesson were on display questions.

Apart from the topic and objectives of the lesson, it is possible that the dominance of display questions in this study was induced by the classroom context. In the classroom context, it is commonly found that teachers ask more display questions than other question types. They do so to ensure that learning takes place. This is unlike in the social context where questions are asked mostly to fill in missing information for communicative purposes rather than to test knowledge. This study confirms the findings of Long and Sato (1983) on the form and function of teachers' questions that display questions were found most often in the classroom and they were used to have students display knowledge rather than to elicit their ideas and information unknown to the teachers. Other studies such as Pica and Long (1986) on the nature of interactional modifications in the classroom and Wu (1993) on teachers' use of questions in EFL classroom also indicated that display questions were found far more frequently in the language classroom.

To sum up, in this study the teachers' use of different types of questions was dependent on the topic, the objectives of the lesson and the classroom context. When the lesson emphasized the grammatical structure, display questions were more frequently used by the teachers than other question types in order to assess the students' grammatical knowledge and to get them to practise using grammatical structure. When a wide range of issues could be associated with the topic and when the lesson focused on free discussion, the teachers tended to ask more referential questions than other question types. Besides, in the classroom context in which formal teaching and learning took place it is found that display questions were much

more frequently used by the teachers than other question types in order to assess the students' learning. This explains why the greatest number of questions in the study were on display questions.

### 4.1.2 Questioning Strategy Types

Table 4.2 presents the types and number of questioning strategies employed by the four teachers in the classrooms.

**Table 4.2 Questioning Strategies Used by Teachers**

| Questioning Strategy Type | Questioning Strategies | |
|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage |
| 1. Repetition | 78 | 72.90% |
| 2. Simplification | 13 | 12.15% |
| 3. Rephrasing | 10 | 9.34% |
| 4. Decomposition | 6 | 5.61% |
| Total | 107 | 100% |

The results presented above show that repetition was employed the most frequently while decomposition was seldom used by the teachers during their teaching. It can be argued that the classroom context might lend itself to a frequent occurrence of repetition. There seems to be three explanations for the teachers' frequent use of repetition in their classrooms.

First, repetition is considered a convenient strategy for the teachers (Supatcharee Ekasingh, 1991 and Supatcharee Morrow, 1997). When the teachers repeat the question, they do not have to put effort and time in reformulating the previous question. This is unlike asking other types of questioning strategies such as rephrasing or simplification which requires the teachers' effort and time to think of new vocabulary or grammatical structures in reformulating the initial question.

Second, repetition helps the students process questions better. When the teachers repeat a question, the students are given a second chance to hear the same content, vocabulary, and grammatical structure in the repeated question. This may decrease the students' difficulties in understanding the initial question since there is no new information in the repeated question (Chaudron, 1988; Wesche and Ready, 1985 and Supatcharee Morrow, 1997). The following is an example of the teacher's use of repetition to help the students process the question better.

**Example 5: Repetition which helps students process the question better**

T:   Which suggestion do you think is better?

Ss:   [Silence]

T:   What suggestion, from six suggestions, you think that it will be practical?

Ss:   [Silence]

*T:   Which suggestion do you think is better?*

Ss:   Put the deposit on bottles.

(Class A, lesson 2)

In example 5, the teacher asked the students "Which suggestion do you think is better?", but her question failed to elicit responses from the students. Then she rephrased her question in the hope that it would help the students respond to her question. However, the rephrased question did not succeed in getting any response from the students. As a result, the teacher decided to repeat her initial question. This time, her repetition was successful in eliciting a response from the students. The above example shows that hearing the same question more than one time enabled the students to process the teacher's question better.

Third, repetition provides the students with a hint for figuring out the answer to the question. This is especially true when the teachers stress key words and phrases in the question. Repetition could lead the students to think about the grammatical structure and the content focus at hand. This is shown in examples 6 and 7.

**Example 6: Repetition functioning to lead students to think about grammatical structure focus**

T: …The order is the normal word order. You use the auxiliary verb here?

Ss: [Silence]

T: *You use the auxiliary verb here?* {The teacher stressed "the auxiliary verb".}

Ss: No.                                                       (Class C, lesson 1)

In the above example, at the beginning of the lesson the teacher was reviewing how to change direct questions into indirect questions which had been taught in the previous lesson. Then she asked "You use the auxiliary verb here?". When there was no response from the students, the teacher repeated her question and stressed the key words "the auxiliary verb". This was done to guide the students into thinking whether they used the auxiliary verb when they changed direct questions into indirect questions. Doing this enabled the students to give a response to the teacher's question.

**Example 7: Repetition functioning to lead students to think about issue relating to content focus**

T: Yes, tropical hardwood… How is the rain forest important?

Ss: [Silence]

T: *How is the rain forest important?* {The teacher stressed "the rain forest".}

Ss: Keep plants, animals.

(Class C, lesson 2)

In example 7, the teacher repeated the question and stressed the words "the rain forest" to get the students to draw upon their background knowledge about the rain forest. As a result, the students were able to respond to the teacher' s question.

It can be concluded that repetition is a questioning strategy helpful for both the teachers and the students. It is considered a convenient questioning strategy the teachers have in hand. Repetition does not require the teachers' time and effort to

reformulate the question. At the same time, it provides the students with an opportunity to hear the questions repeated verbatim again. This helps the students process the questions better. In addition, it helps the students to figure out the answer to the question by drawing the students' attention to the language structure or the content of the lesson.

## 4.2  Types of Questions and Questioning Strategies which Elicited Students' Responses and Length of Students' Responses

This section presents the findings and discussion of question and questioning strategy types which elicited responses from the students and the length of their responses. The first part deals with questions; the second part, questioning strategies.

### 4.2.1  Questions

#### 4.2.1.1  Types of Questions Which Elicited Students' Responses

Table 4.3 presents the types and number of questions which elicited responses from the students.

**Table 4.3  Questions Which Elicited Students' Responses**

| Question Type | | Questions with Responses | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number | Percentage |
| Epistemic | 1. Display questions | 86 | 58.90% |
| | 2. Referential questions | 44 | 30.14% |
| Echoic | 3. Confirmation checks | 10 | 6.85% |
| | 4. Clarification requests | 5 | 3.42% |
| | 5. Comprehension checks | 1 | 0.68% |
| Total | | 146 | 100% |

**Note:** The total number of questions asked was 279.

As shown in table 4.3, 146 out of 279 questions were successful in eliciting responses from the students. The findings show that between the two major types of questions, epistemic questions elicited more responses than echoic questions and display questions elicited a greater number of responses than referential questions. This is in harmony with the study conducted by Wu (1993) who found that in a Hong Kong context display questions elicited more responses from the students than referential questions. It is, therefore, essential to examine reasons why display questions elicited a greater number of responses than referential questions in the language classroom in the Thai context.

The main reason why the students responded to display questions more often than to referential questions in the classrooms may be that responding to display questions does not require much of the students' time, effort, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge in formulating their responses. This is because, as mentioned earlier, most display questions in this study were asked to test the students' grammatical knowledge and to have them practise the grammatical structure being taught. In addition, the answers to the questions were provided in the coursebook. The following example illustrates an occurrence of the students' responses to display questions functioning to have them practise a grammatical structure in this study. The responses in the following lesson transcription extract are shown in italics.

**Example 8: Students' responses to display questions functioning to have them practise grammatical structure**

T: Are you going to town? OK. How to report it? How to report it?

*Ss: She asked her _ _ _ (Inaudible)*

T: She asked her whether, she asked her whether she was going to town.

   OK. And the last question is _ _ _

Ss: Do you like shopping?

T: Are you (going shopping?

Ss: Are you (going shopping?

T: Are you going shopping? Yes. Are you going shopping? How to report it? How to report it?

*Ss: She asked her.*

T: She asked her.

*Ss: She asked her if she was going shopping.*

(Class C, lesson 1)

In example 8, after the teacher explained how to change actual questions into reported questions, she provided the students with a transformation practice exercise. The teacher asked the questions to have the students practise changing the actual questions which were in the present continuous tense into reported questions. The students could answer the questions because they used the grammatical rule the teacher taught previously.

The next example is an illustration of the students' responses to a display question of which the answer was in the coursebook.

**Example 9: Students' response to display question of which the answer was in the coursebook**

T: ... OK. I was sitting in a corner when a guy came up and asked me if I knew anyone at the party. I said I didn't.

Ss: I was sitting in a corner when a guy came up and asked me if I knew anyone at the party. I said I didn't.

T: What is the reported question in this situation?

*Ss: A guy came up and asked me if I knew anyone at the party. I said I didn't.*

(Class B, lesson 1)

In example 9, after the teacher reviewed how to change actual questions into reported questions, she read for the students the sentence provided in the coursebook "I was sitting in a corner when a guy came up and asked me if I knew anyone at the party. I said I didn't". Then, the students repeated what the teacher had just read. After that the teacher asked the students a question to test whether they could find the

reported question in the sentence. The students were able to respond to the question because they took the answer straight from the coursebook.

The two examples presented above show that when the students in those instances responded to display questions, they did not have to put much time and effort in search of vocabulary and grammatical structure to formulate their answers. The students could take the answers straight from the coursebook or produce their answers following the same grammatical rules. This helped decrease the students' difficulties in formulating the answers which, in turn, enabled them to respond to display questions more often in the classrooms. In addition, the teacher had presented the structure to the students before she asked them questions to test their grammatical knowledge or have them practise it. The familiarity with the structure currently presented might have helped the students to recall their knowledge easily and quickly which might have enabled them to respond to display questions more often than to referential questions. It can, then, be seen that in responding to display questions, the students only had to recall and demonstrate their comprehension of the grammatical structure currently presented in the lesson. They did not have to spend much time thinking of vocabulary and grammatical structure in formulating the answers. So, it can be concluded that responding to display questions asked in this class requires the students to undertake a low level of thinking and thus it is easier for the students to reply.

On the contrary, responding to referential questions requires the students to generate their own responses which involve higher-level thinking. Referential questions found in this study required the students to have vocabulary and grammatical knowledge and background knowledge concerning environmental issues. The students may have found it difficult to understand the questions and put ideas into words. Apart from insufficient vocabulary, grammatical knowledge and background knowledge concerning environmental issues, the students also needed time to formulate the answers to referential questions. It was found that when the students

have limited vocabulary, grammatical knowledge and background knowledge concerning environmental issues, and when they were not given enough wait-time, this may make referential questions more difficult for them to respond to. The above discussion shows that responding to referential questions tended to be more demanding of the students' thought, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, time and mastery of the content area of the lesson.

To conclude, in this study, display questions elicited more responses from the students than referential questions because responding to display questions did not require the students' much time, effort, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge in formulating answers. This is because the answers were provided in the coursebook and the students were familiar with the grammatical structure currently presented in the lessons. This enabled the students to give responses to display questions easily and quickly. Unlike responding to display questions, responding to referential questions required much time, effort, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge in formulating answers because the students had to generate their own responses. To generate their own responses, the students have to have ideas, the background knowledge required by the questions and language ability to convey their intended meaning.

### 4.2.1.2 Length of Students' Responses to Teachers' Questions

The following table presents the average number of words per response to each question type.

**Table 4.4 Average Number of Words per Response to Each Question Type**

| Question Type | | Questions with Responses | | Number of Words in Responses | Average Number of Words per Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number | Percentage | | |
| Epistemic | 1. Display questions | 86 | 58.90% | 358 | 4.16 |
| | 2. Referential questions | 44 | 30.14% | 111 | 2.52 |
| Echoic | 3. Confirmation checks | 10 | 6.85% | 10 | 1.00 |
| | 4. Clarification requests | 5 | 3.42% | 11 | 2.20 |
| | 5. Comprehension checks | 1 | 0.68% | 1 | 1.00 |
| Total | | 146 | 100% | 491 | 3.36 |

As shown in table 4.4, epistemic questions elicited a greater number of words per response than echoic questions. Among epistemic questions, it was found that display questions elicited a greater number of words per response than referential questions did. Surprisingly, this is not in agreement with other studies which revealed that referential questions elicited a greater number of words per response than display questions. It is, therefore, necessary to explore why display questions in this study elicited a greater number of words per response than referential questions.

In this study, there seems to be two reasons why display questions elicited a greater number of words per response.

First of all, it might be possible that the quantity of words in responses to display questions provided in the coursebook contributed to a greater number of words per response. This can be seen in the following example.

**Example 10: Students' Responses to display questions provided in the coursebook**

T: Let's see the first situation, I was in the students' room waiting for my class to begin when the girl in the next seat asked me which class I was in. So, what is the reported question?

Ss: *The girl asked me which class I was in.*

T:   ...OK. I was sitting in a corner when a guy came up and asked me if I knew anyone at the party.  I said I didn't.

Ss:  *The guy came up and asked me if I knew anyone at the party.*

T:   OK. Good...OK. and the last question, I was waiting for my bus yesterday when a woman came and stood next to me and asked me how long I had been waiting.  So, what is the reported question?

Ss:  *A woman came and stood next to me and asked me how long I had been waiting.*

T:   Now, right.

(Class A, lesson 1)

In example 10, the teacher read for the students sentences describing three situations and asked them to identify the reported questions.  The students were able to produce a great number of words per response because they took responses from the coursebook and these responses contained a great number of words.

Second, the students were able to produce a greater number of words per response to display questions because most display questions in this study required the application of currently learnt grammatical knowledge which was restricted to reported questions.  So, the range of the teachers' questions and the scope of grammatical knowledge required by the questions were limited and therefore predictable.  Additionally, the students were familiar with the grammatical structure when they did the exercise.  Also, drill activities, particularly at the practice stage, require the students to provide complete responses.  So, the limited range of the teachers' questions, the limited scope of grammatical knowledge coupled with the students' familiarity with the grammatical structure and drill practice enabled the students to produce complete responses to the questions because their responses involved slight transformation of original sentences.  This, in turn, contributed to a greater number of words per response to display questions in this study.  An example is given below:

**Example 11: Students' responses to display questions functioning to have them practise grammatical structure**

T:  How to report this question "Do you know many people?"

*Ss: He asked me if I knew many people.*

T:  "Where are you going?" She asked_ _ _

*Ss: She asked me where I was going.*

T:  Yes, change tense further back. Next, "Are you French?"

*Ss: She asked me if I was French.*

(Class D, lesson 1)

In example 11, after the teacher presented to the students the rules for changing actual questions into reported questions and had them practise changing the actual questions into reported questions by using the exercise in the coursebook, she provided the students with a supplementary exercise. The above example shows that the students were able to produce complete answers to the questions. This might have been caused by their familiarity with the grammatical structure.

Responding to referential questions, on the other hand, often requires the students' ability to discuss their knowledge of the world which entails the use of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge not currently learnt in the lesson. As discussed earlier, most referential questions in this study required the students' knowledge concerning environmental issues. So, the teachers' referential questions were open-ended and unpredictable. To answer such questions, the students needed a wide range of both vocabulary concerning environmental issues and grammatical knowledge as well as enough wait-time provided by the teachers. So, if the students had limited vocabulary concerning the environmental issues, grammatical knowledge and time, they might not be able to spontaneously produce complete and elaborate responses to the teachers' questions. This may have led to fewer words per response to referential questions in this study. The following is an example:

**Example 12: Students' responses to referential questions requiring their ability to discuss their knowledge of the world**

T:   … How does it help the environment if the students don't throw away old bottles- take them to the bottle bank?

*Ss:  Save plastic.*

T:   What kinds of old bottles you should keep?

*Ss:  Plastic and glass.*

T:   Plastic and glass bottles. Um, they can be reused or recycled.  And the last question, for the last one, don't buy the furniture made from tropical hard wood.

*Ss:  It save.*

T:   What does it help?

*Ss:  It stop cut.*

*S:   It stopping cut trees.*

T:   It helps stop cutting down the tropical rain forest.

(Class D, lesson 2)

In example 12, after finishing the discussion with the students about how taking old bottles to the bottle bank helps save the environment, the teacher moved on to discuss the last question about how not buying the furniture made from tropical hard wood helps save the environment.  The students tried to answer the teacher's question, but they were not able to produce a complete answer.  After the teacher asked "What does it help?", the students still could not produce a complete response to the question.   The students' difficulties in producing a complete and comprehensible response might have resulted from their limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge.  So, it is possible that limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge required by the questions might have made the students produce fewer words per response to referential questions.

Besides, responding to referential questions required students to have the ability to produce their own responses to the questions relying on their stored knowledge spontaneously. So, when the students did not have sufficient time to formulate the answers, they were unable to produce complete responses to referential questions, which in turn, resulted in fewer words per response to the questions. This can be seen in example 13 which shows that the students stuttered while trying to formulate their responses to the teachers' questions.

**Example 13: Students' responses to referential questions requiring them to spontaneously produce responses relying on their stored knowledge**

T: OK. Now, number 5. Don't buy furniture made from tropical hard wood.

Ss: *Don't buy furniture made from tropical hard wood.*

T: Why don't we do this?

Ss: *Because_ _ _ because_ _ _ because_ _ _*

T: Because_ _ _

Ss: *Because we_ _ _*

T: Next please.

S: *Because we do not want cut the trees.*

T: Good, because you don't want to cut down the trees.

(Class B, lesson 2)

In the above example, the students stuttered while they were trying to formulate the answer. After the teacher encouraged them to complete the response by saying "Next please", one student could produce a more elaborate response which was almost perfect. This shows that the student had the ability to answer this question, but he needed more time to formulate his answers.

In sum, display questions elicited a greater number of words per response than referential questions because the answers to display questions provided in the coursebook contained a great number of words. In addition, most display questions

in this study required the students' application of currently learnt grammatical knowledge. The students' familiarity with the grammatical structure required by display questions in this study enabled them to produce a greater number of words per response to the questions. In contrast, referential questions required the students' ability to discuss knowledge concerning environmental issues. To be able to answer the questions, the students needed environmental knowledge and a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to express their intended messages. Moreover, the students had to produce their own responses spontaneously. So, when the students had limited time to recall their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge as well as to formulate their spontaneous responses, they could not produce complete and elaborate responses to the questions. This resulted in fewer words per response to referential questions in this study.

### 4.2.2 Questioning Strategies

#### 4.2.2.1 Types of Questioning Strategies Which Elicited Students' Responses

The following table presents the types and number of questioning strategies which elicited responses from the students.

**Table 4.5 Questioning Strategies Which Elicited Students' Responses**

| Questioning Strategy Type | Questioning Strategies with Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage |
| 1. Repetition | 10 | 45.45% |
| 2. Simplification | 5 | 22.73% |
| 3. Decomposition | 4 | 18.18% |
| 4. Rephrasing | 3 | 13.64% |
| Total | 22 | 100 % |

Note: The total number of questioning strategies employed was 107.

Table 4.5 shows that 22 out of 107 questioning strategies were successful in eliciting responses from the students. They accounted for only 20.56% of all questioning strategies the four teachers employed during their teaching. Of all the questioning strategies successful in eliciting responses from the students, repetition elicited the greatest number of responses. There are two reasons why repetition elicited the greatest number of responses from the students in the classrooms.

Firstly, repetition helped the students process the questions better because they were provided with a second chance to hear the same questions. The following is an example:

**Example 14: Students' response to repetition which helped them process the question better**

T:  The second scene, I was sitting in the corner when the guy came up and asked me if I knew anyone at the party. I said I didn't.

What should be the actual question?

Ss: [Silence]

T:  What should be the actual question?

*Ss: Do you know anyone at the party?*

(Class C, lesson 1)

In the above example, the students could answer the teacher' s question after the teacher asked the same question again. It could be because repetition gave the students more processing time and the students had a chance to hear the same question two times. Hearing the same content, vocabulary and structure of the question twice might have helped the students process the question better and thus enabled them to respond to the question. This may have led to a greater number of responses to the repeated questions.

Secondly, repetition provided the students with a hint for figuring out the answer to the question, especially when the teachers stressed key words in the question. An example is presented below:

**Example 15: Students' response to repetition which provided them with a hint for figuring out the answer to the question**

Ss: She asked him if he had been there before.

T: Loudly please. One, two, three.

Ss: She asked him if he had been there before.

T: Right, if he had been there. What is the tense, he had been there?

Ss: [Silence]

*T:* What is the tense, he had been there? {The teacher stressed "he had been".}

*Ss: Past perfect.*

(Class D, lesson 1)

In example 15, repetition was used to lead the students to think about the grammatical structure at hand. The teacher repeated the initial question and stressed part of the question, "he had been", in order to help the students recall their knowledge of tenses. This provided some indication of the answer and enabled the students to answer the teacher's question.

To sum up, repetition is the questioning strategy that elicited the greatest number of responses of all questioning strategies because when the teachers repeated questions, the students had a chance to hear the questions again. This helped the students process the questions better. Additionally, repetition provided the students with a hint for figuring out the answers to the questions, and thus enabled them to provide the answers.

### 4.2.2.2 Length of Students' Responses to Teachers' Questioning Strategies

The following table presents an average number of words per response to each questioning strategy type.

**Table 4.6 Average Number of Words per Response to Each Questioning Strategy Type**

| Questioning Strategy Type | Questioning Strategies with Responses | | Number of Words in Responses | Average Number of Words per Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage | | |
| 1. Repetition | 10 | 45.45% | 27 | 2.70 |
| 2. Simplification | 5 | 22.73% | 20 | 4.00 |
| 3. Decomposition | 4 | 18.18% | 6 | 1.50 |
| 4. Rephrasing | 3 | 13.64% | 10 | 3.30 |
| Total | 22 | 100 % | 63 | 2.86 |

Table 4.6 shows that of all questioning strategies employed in the classrooms, simplification elicited the greatest number of words per response. It can be argued that, this maybe because in this study, all simplification which elicited responses followed referential questions. Referential questions are by nature open-ended and accept a wide range of possible answers. When the teachers simplified referential questions, these questions made the questions simpler, clearer and narrower. This could help the students understand simplified referential questions better and provide appropriate answers which contained a greater number of words due to the nature of referential questions. The following is an example:

**Example 16 : Students' response to simplified referential question**

T:  The first thing that that the individual that that you have to do is if it isn't very far, walk or cycle – leave the car at home. Why do you have to do this?

Ss: [Silence]

T:  How does it help save the environment if you leave the car at home?

*Ss: You can save the petrol and decrease the pollution.*

T:  OK. Good. You can save the petrol and reduce the pollution.

(Class A, lesson 2)

In example 16, after the teacher asked the students why they had to walk or cycle and leave the car at home if it wasn't very far, the students were silent. It is possible that the students remained silent because the scope of the answer to the question was broad. They were not sure of the answer the teacher was expecting. After the teacher simplified her initial referential question by asking how leaving the car at home helps save the environment, the students were able to produce a complete response to the question. This could be because the simplified question led the students to think specifically about the answer of how leaving the car at home helps save the environment.

## 4.3 Factors Affecting Absence of Students' Responses to Teachers' Questions

This part deals with factors affecting the absence of students' responses to the teachers' questions in this study. To arrive at factors affecting the absence of students' responses to the teachers' questions, it is necessary to first present the number and types of questions which failed to elicit responses from the students as background information.

### 4.3.1 Questions Which Failed to Elicit Students' Responses

The total number of questions which failed to elicit responses from the students in the classrooms in this study is presented in table 4.7.

**Table 4.7 Questions Which Failed to Elicit Students' Responses**

| Questions Asked | | Questions Which Failed to Elicit Students' Responses | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| 279 | 100% | 133 | 47.67% |

According to the above table, questions which failed to elicit students' responses in the classrooms accounted for 47.67 % of the total number of questions asked in this study. In this study, questions which failed to elicit students' responses in the classrooms refer to the questions which were not answered by the students and the questions which were answered by the teachers themselves. The data are further delineated in the following table:

**Table 4.8 Questions Which Were Not Answered by Students and Which Were Answered by Teachers**

| Question Type | | Number of Questions Failing to Elicit Students' Responses | Number of Questions Not Answered by Students | Number of Questions Answered by Teachers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Epistemic | 1. Display questions | 71 | 33 | 38 |
| | 2. Referential questions | 60 | 36 | 24 |
| Echoic | 3. Comprehension checks | 2 | 2 | - |
| Total | | 133 (100%) | 71 (53.38%) | 62 (46.62%) |

In this study, it was found that only three question types did not receive students' responses in the classrooms. 53.38% of all the questions which failed to elicit responses in the classrooms were not answered by the students and the other 46.62% were answered by the teachers themselves. Since one of the purposes of this study is to investigate factors affecting the students' silence after the teachers' questions, only the data of the questions which were not answered by the students will be analyzed and discussed in more detail. The following table presents the types and number of questions which were not answered by the students in the classrooms.

**Table 4.9  Questions Which Were Not Answered by Students**

| Question Type | | Questions | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| **Epistemic** | 1. Display questions | 33 | 46.48% |
| | 2. Referential questions | 36 | 50.70% |
| **Echoic** | 3. Comprehension checks | 2 | 2.82% |
| **Total** | | 71 | 100% |

Table 4.9 shows that the greatest number of questions which were not answered by the students in the classrooms belongs to referential questions (50.70%). This is followed by display questions (46.48%) and comprehension checks (2.82%). Since about half the number of questions asked (53.38% as shown in table 4.8) failed to elicit responses from the students in the classrooms, it is worthwhile investigating why the students were silent after the teachers' questions and what inhibited their responses.

### 4.3.2  Causes of Students' Silence after Teachers' Questions

The following section presents the findings and discussion of the students' responses to the questionnaire as to why they were silent after the teachers'

questions in the classrooms. A summary of the frequency of the students' responses to the first part of the questionnaire about reasons as to why they were silent after the teachers' questions is presented in table 4.10. It must be noted that the students' comments in the second part of the questionnaire about problems they had with the teachers' questioning and their responding to the teachers' questions were not presented. This is because the comments were similar to the students' responses to the first part of the questionnaire. Instead, the students' comments were used to explain the phenomenon and support the discussion of the results obtained from the first part of the questionnaire.

**Table 4.10  Students' Responses to Questionnaire as to Why They Were Silent after Teachers' Questions**

| Construct under Which Students Were Silent after Teachers' Questions | Students' Responses to Questionnaire | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| 1.  The students understood the teachers' questions, but they could not answer them. | 803 | 55.76% |
| 2.  The students understood the teachers' questions and knew the answers, but they didn't answer them. | 383 | 26.60% |
| 3   The students didn't understand the teachers' questions and they could not answer them. | 254 | 17.64% |
| **Total** | **1,440** | **100%** |

Table 4.10 shows that most of the students' silence occurred because the students did not have the ability to answer the teachers' questions even though they understood the questions (55.76%). This is followed by the reasons that the students did not answer the teachers' questions even though they understood the questions and knew the answers (26.60%) and they could not answer the questions because they did not understand the questions (17.64%). As shown in table 4.10, it can be seen that the students most of the time understood the teachers' questions but they were not able to

formulate responses to them. This seems to imply that the students comprehended most of the input they were exposed to in the form of questions, but they did not have the ability to create output or responses which involves drawing upon their interlanguage system to communicate their intended meaning. Swain (1995) and Richards (1999) maintain that students' inability to produce output even though they comprehend input depends on several factors such as task demand, their previous experience, background knowledge and language ability.

The students in this study identified several underlying causes of their silence after the teachers' questions under three constructs. Under construct 1, it was found that each of the underlying causes affected the students' inability to respond to each question type to a different degree. Table 4.11 further delineates the frequency of occurrence of the underlying causes of the students' silence after each question type under construct 1.

**Table 4.11 Causes of Students' Silence after Each Question Type under Construct 1**

| Construct 1: The students understood the teachers' questions, but they could not answer them. This is because: | Students' Responses to Questionnaire | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Question Type | | | Total |
| | Referential Questions | Display Questions | Comprehension Checks | N |
| - The students could not put ideas into words. | 242 | 55 | 2 | 299 |
| - The students didn't know the grammar. | 78 | 50 | 2 | 130 |
| - The teachers didn't give sufficient time to formulate the answers. | 60 | 58 | 9 | 127 |
| - The students didn't know the vocabulary. | 81 | 37 | 3 | 121 |
| - The students didn't have the knowledge required by the questions. | 71 | 36 | 2 | 109 |
| - Others: The students were talking with friends or opening the coursebook. | 5 | 12 | - | 17 |
| Total | 537 (66.87%) | 248 (30.88%) | 18 (2.24%) | 803 (100%) |

Table 4.11 reveals that, in general, the students' inability to put ideas into words, their limited grammatical knowledge, insufficient wait-time provided by the teachers, their limited vocabulary and background knowledge required by the questions most frequently explain the students' inability to respond to referential questions. It is, therefore, interesting to take a closer look at the extent that each of these causes affected the students' silence after referential questions in the classrooms. Table 4.12 presents the relative frequencies of occurrence of causes of the students' silence after referential questions.

**Table 4.12 Students' Responses to Questionnaire as to Why They Were Silent after Referential Questions under Construct 1**

| Construct 1: The students understood the teachers' questions, but they could not answer them.  This is because: | Students' Responses to Questionnaire | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| - The students could not put ideas into words. | 242 | 45.07% |
| - The students didn't know the vocabulary. | 81 | 15.08% |
| - The students didn't know the grammar. | 78 | 14.53% |
| - The students didn't have the knowledge required by the teachers' questions. | 71 | 13.22% |
| - The teachers didn't give sufficient time to formulate the answers. | 60 | 11.17% |
| - Others: The students were talking with friends and opening the coursebook. | 5 | 0.93% |
| **Total** | **537** | **100%** |

In this study, the most frequent cause of the students' inability to respond to referential questions is that they were not able to put ideas into words (45.07%). This is followed by their limited vocabulary (15.08%), limited grammatical knowledge (14.53%), limited background knowledge required by the questions (13.22%), insufficient wait-time provided by the teachers (11.17%) and others (0.93%).

Based on the frequencies of occurrence, the students' inability to put ideas into words is considered the most crucial factor contributing to the students' inability to respond to referential questions in the classrooms.  It can be argued that the students'

inability to put ideas into words was caused firstly by their limited L2 knowledge which can be inferred from their not knowing vocabulary and grammar and secondly by their limited background knowledge required by the questions. It must be pointed out that L2 knowledge and background knowledge are fundamental to the students' ability to put ideas into words. So, when the students in this study had limited L2 ability and background knowledge, they might have encountered difficulties and frustration in formulating answers to the teachers' questions. The results of this study confirm those of Strong (1983) and Flanigan (1991 cited in Johnson, 1995). They all found that limited L2 ability and background knowledge relevant to the lesson are important factors affecting ESL and EFL students' ability to formulate responses as intended. The following example illustrates a situation in which the students' limited L2 ability led to their inability to respond to a referential question despite the fact that they understood the question.

**Example 17: Situation in which students' limited L2 ability led to their inability to answer referential question even though they understood the question**

T:     … O.K. Double the price of petrol, what do you think about this suggestion?

*Ss:* ลดการซื้อน้ำมัน {The students answered "reduce buying petrol" in Thai.}

T:   Yes, reduce buying petrol.

(Class C, lesson 2)

In the above example, the teacher elicited the students' opinion about the government's policy on saving the environment: double the price of petrol. The example shows that the students understood the teacher's question but they were not able to answer it in English. According to the students' responses to the open-ended item in the second part of the questionnaire, they were unable to answer the question in English because they had limited vocabulary and the grammatical structure needed to formulate their intended responses. This comment may explain why the students in this example produced the

response in Thai instead. It can be seen that even though the students had an idea, they were not able to put their ideas into words when they had limited L2 ability.

The next example illustrates a situation in which the students' limited background knowledge required by the teacher's question led to their inability to respond to referential questions even though they understood them.

**Example 18: Situation in which students' limited background knowledge led to their inability to answer referential question even though they understood the question**

T: Do you know about the rain forest? It is going to keep endangered
   species. Endangered species refers to?

Ss: Animals.

T: Wildlife or animals. What else?

*Ss: [Silence]*

T: It refers to only animals? No, it also refers to plants, flowers.

(Class D, lesson 2)

In the above example, the teacher and the students were discussing the importance of a rain forest. The teacher asked the students questions about endangered species, but they were not able to provide complete answers. This might be because their knowledge about endangered species was limited to animals. So, this shows that when the students had insufficient background knowledge relating to the topic of the lesson, they did not have ideas to put into words and thus were unable to provide the answers to the teacher's questions.

Apart from limited L2 ability and background knowledge required by the questions, insufficient wait-time provided by the teachers is another factor contributing to the students' silence after referential questions. In this study, it was observed from the videotape recording that an average length of wait-time between questions was 3.60 seconds. It is possible that 3.60-second wait-time was considered insufficient by the students due to their limited L2 ability and background knowledge as has been pointed out

above. With these limitations, the wait-time provided by the teachers contributed to the possibility that, even if the students had tried to respond to the teachers' questions, they would not be able to formulate the answers within the alloted time. This confirms Good and Brophy (1974), Rowe (1974), Brock (1986), Van Lier (1988a), Loya (1998) and Suzuki (2000) who investigaed wait-time in EFL/ESL classes and classes where English is used as a mother tongue and found that the teachers tended not to wait long enough for the students' answers. In their studies, the teachers mostly waited for the students to answer the questions for three seconds. As a result, the students could not provide the answers in time. This shows that even in a class in which English is used as a mother tongue, a three-second wait-time is still considered insufficient. So, in Thailand where English is taught as a foreign language, it is very likely that the students might need more time to put their ideas into words in order to provide their answers to the teachers' questions.

In sum, under construct 1, it was found that most of the time the students were unable to respond to referential questions even though they understood them. This is due to three major factors. Firstly, the students had limited L2 ability. Secondly, they had limited background knowledge required by the questions. Thirdly, the teachers did not provide sufficient wait-time for the students to formulate the answers.

As for construct 2, it was found that various underlying causes contributed to the students' not answering the teachers' questions even though they understood the questions and knew the answers. Each of these causes differently affected the students' not responding to each question type. Table 4.13 presents the underlying causes of the students' not responding to the teachers' questions and their frequencies of occurrence.

**Table 4.13  Causes of Students' Silence after Each Question Type under Construct 2**

| Construct 2: The students understood the teachers' questions and knew the answers, but they didn't answer them.  This is because: | Students' Responses to Questionnaire | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Question Type | | | Total |
| | Referential Questions | Display Questions | Comprehension Checks | N |
| - The students waited for answers from the teachers. | 37 | 79 | - | 116 |
| - The students were afraid of making mistakes. | 37 | 57 | - | 94 |
| - Other: The students didn't want to answer the questions. | 16 | 20 | 10 | 46 |
| - The students didn't like to speak. | 10 | 23 | 10 | 43 |
| - The students didn't like speaking English. | 9 | 7 | 5 | 21 |
| - The teachers' questions were too easy and not challenging. | 10 | 7 | - | 17 |
| - The teachers' questions were not interesting. | 2 | 10 | 4 | 16 |
| - The students didn't want to answer the questions which required their opinion. | 13 | 2 | - | 15 |
| - The students were shy. | 7 | 3 | 1 | 11 |
| - The students were occupied with a personal problem. | 2 | 2 | - | 4 |
| Total | 143 (37.34%) | 210 (54.83%) | 30 (7.83%) | 383 (100%) |

Table 4.13 shows that the students' waiting for answers from the teachers, fear of making mistakes, unfavorable attitude towards speaking and speaking English, and not wanting to answer the questions frequently affected the students' not responding to display questions even though they understood the questions and knew the answers.  Therefore, it is necessary to examine the degree that each of these causes affected the students' not responding to display questions in the classrooms. The following table presents relative frequencies of occurrence of causes of the students'silence after display questions.

**Table 4.14  Students' Responses to Questionnaire as to Why They Were Silent**

**after  Display Questions under Construct 2**

| Construct 2: The students understood the teachers' questions and knew the answers, but they didn't answer them.  This is because: | Students' Responses to Questionnaire | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| - The students waited for answers from the teachers. | 79 | 37.62% |
| - The students were afraid of making mistakes. | 57 | 27.14% |
| - The students didn't like to speak. | 23 | 10.95% |
| - Other: The students didn't want to answer the questions. | 20 | 9.52% |
| - The teachers' questions were not interesting. | 10 | 4.76% |
| - The students didn't like speaking English. | 7 | 3.33% |
| - The teachers' questions were too easy and not challenging. | 7 | 3.33% |
| - The students were shy. | 3 | 1.43% |
| - The students didn't want to answer the questions which required their opinion. | 2 | 0.95% |
| - The students were occupied with a personal problem. | 2 | 0.95% |
| **Total** | **210** | **100%** |

On the basis of the frequencies of occurrence, four causes frequently affected the students' not responding to display questions even though they understood the questions and knew the answers.  The first cause is the students' waiting for answers from the teachers  (37.62%).  The second is their fear of making mistakes (27.14%). The third is their unfavorable attitude toward speaking (10.95%) and the last cause is their not wanting to answer the teachers' questions (9.52%).

In this study, it can be argued that the students' not responding to display questions even though they understood them and knew the answers were caused by the students' inactive participation in classroom interaction. This is in harmony with Suvalee Chinkhumthornwong (1985) and Pojaman Som-In (1998) who found that Thai students preferred to listen to teachers rather than to take part in a conversation or initiate classroom interaction.  In this study, the students' inactive participation can be noticed by the students' waiting for answers from the teachers and their not wanting to answer the teachers' questions.  It is also possible that the students' fear of making mistakes and their

unfavorable attitude toward speaking English contributed to their inactive participation in classroom interaction. To better understand why these causes affected the students' not actively participating in classroom interaction, each of them is discussed in more detail below:

To begin with, the students' waiting for answers from the teachers and their not wanting to answer the questions occurred because the students might have felt that publicly displaying their knowledge would be seen by their peers as showing off, hence they avoided answering the teachers' questions in the classroom (Suvalee Chinkhumthornwong, 1985). Besides, the students' perception of the role and status of teachers in Thailand might also contribute to the students' waiting for answers from the teachers and their not wanting to answer the questions. Thai teachers are respected and are viewed as ones who provide knowledge; whatever they say will be accepted by students. More importantly, teachers always dominate the talk in the language classroom (Pojaman Som-in, 1998). Therefore, the students in this study might not see themselves as having an active role in the class and thus were not actively involved, or rarely initiated and participated in classroom interaction.

Another explanation why the students did not answer display questions even though they understood them and knew the answers involves their fear of making mistakes. In this study, it is possible that limited L2 ability further contributed to the students' fear of making mistakes in the classrooms. When the students had limited L2 ability, they might not be confident in their ability to respond to the teachers' questions because they were in fear of making mistakes in front of their peers. It might be possible that fear of making mistakes led to the students' not wanting to answer the questions and waiting for answers from the teachers instead of answering the questions by themselves. The students tended to be in silence because they did not want to lose face for fear that they would provide wrong answers. So, it was safer to stay silent which meant that they would not be laughed at and not be embarrassed. The finding of this study confirms those of previous studies which found that Thai students preferred to listen to teachers rather than to take risks in

their learning (Suvalee Chinkhumthornwong, 1985; Sakorn Suasongsilp, 1990 and Pojaman Som-in, 1998).

Unfavorable attitude towards speaking English in the classroom is another cause contributing to the students' not actively responding to display questions. Evidence from the videotape recordings showed that the students responded to the teachers' questions more often when the teachers asked the questions in Thai than when they did in English. So, it can be argued that most of the students' silence was caused by their unfavorable attitude toward speaking English in the classroom. The students' unfavorable attitude toward speaking English might have been caused by their unfamiliarity with interacting in English in the classroom. This finding is in accordance with that of Pojaman Som-in (1998) who found that the students in her study did not like to speak English because they were not familiar with asking and answering questions in English in the classroom. Unfamiliarity with interacting in English in the classroom might have caused lack of confidence in speaking English. It is possible that when the students were not confident in speaking English, they were not willing to respond to the teachers' questions and then waited for answers from the teachers. This further inhibited the students' responses and opportunities to practise using the target language spontaneously in the classroom.

To sum up, it can be seen from the above discussion that under construct 2 four main factors contributed to the students' not responding to display questions even though they understood them and knew the answers. The first factor is the students' waiting for answers from the teachers. The second factor deals with their not wanting to answer the questions. The students' waiting for answers from the teachers and not wanting to answer the questions have been caused by their inactive participation in classroom interaction which might have been affected by their perception of the role and status of the teachers. The third factor concerns the students' fear of making mistakes which might have resulted from their limited L2 ability and background knowledge required by the questions. The fourth factor is the students' unfavorable attitude toward speaking English which might have been caused by their unfamiliarity with speaking English in the classrooms.

With regard to construct 3, it was found that several underlying causes of the students' not understanding the teachers' questions resulted in the students' not answering questions. Table 4.15 presents the underlying causes of the students' inability to understand and respond to the teachers' questions and their frequencies of occurrence.

**Table 4.15  Causes of Students' Silence after Each Question Type under Construct 3**

| Construct 3: The students didn't understand the teachers' questions and could not answer them.  This is because: | Students' Responses to Questionnaire | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Question Type | | | Total |
| | Referential Questions | Display Questions | Comprehension Checks | N |
| - The students could not keep up with the pace of the teachers' questions. | 40 | 55 | 3 | 98 |
| - The students didn't listen to the teachers' questions. | 25 | 20 | 13 | 58 |
| - The content was too difficult and complex. | 16 | 20 | 2 | 38 |
| - The teachers used vocabulary which was too difficult. | 13 | 8 | - | 21 |
| - The teachers used grammar which was too difficult. | 7 | 10 | - | 17 |
| - The teachers asked the questions only once. | 5 | 4 | - | 9 |
| - The teachers asked the questions in a very soft voice. | 5 | 3 | 1 | 9 |
| - Other: The students were translating the questions into Thai. | 2 | 2 | - | 4 |
| Total | 11 (44.49%) | 122 (48.03%) | 19 (7.48%) | 254 (100%) |

Table 4.15 shows that the students' inability to keep up with the pace of the teachers' questions, not listening to the teachers' questions, and too difficult and complex content frequently caused the students' not understanding and their inability to respond to both referential and display questions in the classrooms.  It is, therefore, interesting to study the extent that each of these causes affected the students' not understanding and their inability to respond to both question types.   Table 4.16 presents relative frequencies of occurrence of causes of the students' silence after referential and display questions.

**Table 4.16 Students' Responses to Questionnaire as to Why They Were Silent after Referential and Display Questions under Construct 3**

| Construct 3: The students didn't understand the teachers' questions and could not answer them. This is because: | Students' Responses to Questionnaire | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| - The students could not keep up with the pace of the teachers' questions. | 95 | 40.43% |
| - The students didn't listen to the teachers' questions. | 45 | 19.15% |
| - The content was too difficult and complex. | 36 | 15.32% |
| - The teachers used vocabulary which was too difficult. | 21 | 8.93% |
| - The teachers used grammar which was too difficult. | 17 | 7.23% |
| - The teachers asked the questions only once. | 9 | 3.83% |
| - The teachers asked the questions in a very soft voice. | 8 | 3.40% |
| - Other: The students were translating the questions into Thai. | 4 | 1.70% |
| **Total** | **235** | **100%** |

Based on the frequencies of occurrence, the most frequent cause of the students' not understanding and their inability to provide responses to both referential and display questions is the students' inability to keep up with the pace of the teachers' questions (40.43%). This is followed by their not listening to the questions (19.15%) and too difficult and complex content (15.32%). These three major causes will be discussed in more detail.

In this study, the students' inability to keep up with the pace of the teachers' questions might have been caused by their limited L2 ability. This can be seen from the videotape recording which showed that even though the teachers asked questions with a slow rate of delivery, the students still could not answer the questions. As a result, they were not able to understand the questions which further resulted in their inability to answer them.

Another cause contributing to the students' silence after both referential and display questions concerns the students' lack of attention to the teachers' questions. This can be inferred from the students' not listening to the teachers' questions. Paying attention is an initial important step in answering a question (Gall 1984 in Tod, 1999;

Leow, 1997 and Williams, 1999). It offers the students an opportunity to keep up with the pace of the teachers' questions. So, when the students' attention wandered away from what the teacher was asking, for instance, they were talking with their friends or opening their coursebook, then certainly there was very little chance of their processing and understanding the teachers' questions. This further led to their inability to respond to the questions.

Lastly, too difficult and complex content of the lessons is another explanation for the students' not understanding and inability to respond to referential and display questions in this study. The content of the first lesson concerned reported questions and the second lesson, the environment. In the first lesson, the students might not understand reported questions or remember the rules of changing actual questions into reported questions, so they were not able to answer the questions. In the second lesson, it is possible that the teachers' questions about environmental issues were difficult for the students because they required the students' wider range of vocabulary and background knowledge relating to the topic of the lesson. When the students had limited vocabulary and background knowledge, they were not able to understand and answer the questions.

To sum up, under construct 3, it was found that three main factors contributed to the students' inability to understand and respond to both referential and display questions in the classrooms. Firstly, the students could not keep up with the pace of the teachers' questions and could not understand them. Secondly, they did not pay attention to the teachers' questions and lastly the content of the lesson was too difficult and complex for them.

## 4.4 Conclusion

This section presents a summary of the findings and discussion of the study in three main parts. The first part deals with types of questions the teachers used in the classrooms and the extent that each type of them elicited the students' responses. The

second part concerns types of questioning strategies and the extent that each type of them elicited the students' responses. The third part is about factors affecting the absence of the students' responses to the teachers' questions. The findings are summarized as follows:

1.   The teachers used five types of questions in the classrooms: display questions, referential questions, confirmation checks, clarification requests and comprehension checks.  Display questions were found to be predominant.  This is respectively followed by referential questions, confirmation checks, clarification requests and comprehension checks.  The dominance of display questions was caused by the topic, the objectives of the lesson and the classroom context.  Of all the questions asked in the study, display questions elicited the greatest number of responses from the students.  The fact that the students responded to display questions most often might be because responding to display questions does not require much of the students' time, effort, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge in formulating their responses.

As for the length of responses, display questions elicited the greatest number of words per response.  There are two explanations for this.  First, coursebook-provided responses to display questions contained a great quantity of words resulting in the greatest number of words per response.  Second, most display questions in this study required the students' currently learnt knowledge which was about reported questions.  For these reasons, display questions in this study elicited the greatest number of words per response.

2.   The teachers used four types of questioning strategies in the classrooms: repetition, simplification, rephrasing and decomposition.  Repetition was used the most frequently.  This can be explained as follows. First, repetition is a convenient strategy for the teachers.  Second, it helps the students process the questions better.  Third, it provides the students with a hint for figuring out the answers to the questions which led the students to think about the grammatical structure and the content focus at hand. Of all questioning strategies employed in the study, repetition elicited the greatest number of responses from the students.  There are two main explanations why repetition elicited the greatest number

of responses. First, it helps the students process the questions better. Second, it provides the students with a hint for figuring out the answers to the questions.

As for the length of responses, simplification elicited the greatest number of words per response. This is because it makes the questions simpler, clearer and narrower for the students. This helps the students understand the teachers' questions better and thus enables them to produce complete responses which, in turn, contributes to the greatest number of words per response.

3. The students' silence after the teachers' questions in the classrooms occurred in three situations. Firstly, the students were unable to answer referential questions even though they understood the questions. The students' inability to answer referential questions was caused by three main factors: their limited language ability and background knowledge relating to the lesson and insufficient wait-time provided by the teachers. Secondly, the students did not answer display questions even though they understood the questions and knew the answers. This was affected by four main factors: their waiting for answers from the teachers, their not wanting to answer questions, their fear of making mistakes and their unfavorable attitude toward speaking English in the classroom. Thirdly, the students did not understand questions and were unable to answer them. The students' not understanding and not being able to answer questions were induced by three main factors: their inability to keep up with the pace of the teachers' questions, their not paying attention to the teachers' questions and too difficult and complex content.