



TEACHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF SCAFFOLDING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH QUESTIONING AT PRE-READING STAGE

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Abstract:

Research into scaffolding has indicated its roles in assisting students in completing their English language learning tasks, including reading. This paper reports a descriptive study that explores teachers' beliefs and their practices of the questioning strategy to scaffold students' reading comprehension in lower secondary schools in a Mekong delta region. Data collected in this study include questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Participants were sixty-four teachers of English as a foreign language. The findings reported in this paper provide insightful views into how teachers used questions to scaffold student learning of reading comprehension. Pedagogical implications are also presented.

Keywords: teacher beliefs, reading comprehension, scaffolding, questioning

1. Introduction

The advent of scaffolding as an effective instructional tool has presented its indispensable roles in helping students gain academic achievements. Specifically, the ultimate goal of scaffolding is to release students from teacher authority and provides students with greater responsibility for their own learning. The inclusion of scaffolding in English reading classes, therefore, allows students to develop greater autonomy and increase their exposure to learning new knowledge ([Al Eissa & Al-Barghi, 2017](#)).

In Vietnam, the National Foreign Languages Project (VNFLP) launched by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has stressed the pressing need to enhance the quality of language teaching and learning foreign languages, particularly English to respond to the needs of students at all levels of schooling ([Ministry of Education and Training, 2008](#)). However, in the context of teaching reading at Vietnamese schools,

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students had little exposure to strategies to process information and found this skill to be the most difficult one of the four English language skills ([Tran & Phuong, 2018](#)) because teaching is mainly based upon traditional lecturing (e.g., [H. B. Nguyen, 2013](#); [T. T. B. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018](#); [N. T. Pham, 2010](#)). One way to help students enhance their reading comprehension is through questioning of text; however, this potential tool still remains scarce in secondary school contexts. In addition, little is known about how teachers' beliefs and practices of scaffolding through questions may help them to facilitate student learning reading comprehension within the context of teaching and learning in Vietnam. The research reported in this paper therefore fills the gap of how teachers' beliefs and practices of questioning may facilitate student learning of reading comprehension at pre-reading stage over time.

2. Literature review

2.1 Teacher beliefs

Teacher beliefs have been widely advocated to exert a powerful influence on their instructional practices ([Pajares, 1992](#)) and enhance student learning ([H. B. Nguyen, Haworth, & Hansen, 2019](#)). Teacher beliefs are viewed as ways teachers think about their actions ([Pajares, 1992](#)), which results in understanding of how they can improve their practices ([Le & Nguyen, 2017](#); [Nespor, 1987](#)). In particular, there is increased recognition of the role of teacher beliefs about change in teaching and learning of foreign languages ([H. B. Nguyen, 2013](#)). However, there have not been any studies that have examined teacher beliefs about using questioning to scaffold students' comprehension of texts in EFL practice within the Vietnamese context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. This paper therefore specifically focuses on this area of interest and this adds to the literature of scaffolding students' reading comprehension through questions.

2.2 Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to an interactive process that takes place between a reader and a text ([Nuttall, 2005](#); [Rumelhart, 1994](#)). Pang and his colleagues ([2003](#)) describe reading comprehension as an active process that a reader constructs meaning from a text. Grabe (2009) further stresses that reading comprehension is a meaning-making process of the interplay between text, reader's cognitive processes and their prior knowledge. Taken together, reading is an active and dynamic process of understanding a particular text that requires learners to apply a wide of range of reading strategies ([H. B. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2017](#)). From the constructivist viewpoint, reading comprehension is the active learning process that students construct meaning by combining their existing and new knowledge. Thus, reading comprehension allows students to become active and independent readers in the reading process. From the sociocultural perspective, scaffolding is one way to facilitate student learning in the long run.

2.3 Scaffolding

Scaffolding is grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning as it refers to a learning process by which learners can complete their tasks with the support of more knowledgeable people ([Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976](#)). This view implies that when learners can perform their given tasks, scaffolding must be removed as they can become independent ([Ankrum, Genest, & Belcastro, 2014](#); [Belland, 2014](#); [Walqui, 2006](#)). This concept is closely related to the term 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). ZPD is defined as "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*" ([Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86](#)). These conceptualizations highlight the role of support, collaboration, and interaction in relation to effective teaching over student learning.

Another view of scaffolding is that it is a temporary support by teachers who move their students to new levels of understanding and autonomy while completing a particular text ([Reynolds & Daniel, 2018](#); [Rodgers, 2017](#); [Salem, 2017](#)). This form of support therefore is likely to reduce the distance between what students cannot manage and what they can accomplish tasks while learning, thereby fostering their learner autonomy ([Enyew & Yigzaw, 2015](#); [Gibbons, 2002](#)). Thus, teacher scaffolding plays an important part in helping students comprehend texts.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'scaffolding' is used to refer to teachers' temporary support to students in completing learning activity and new understanding and this type of instruction provides students with an opportunity to take responsibility for their English language learning.

2.3.1 Features of scaffolding

From the pedagogical perspectives, scaffolding is underpinned by three scales: supportive (or contingent), collaborative, and interactive structures ([Walqui, 2006](#)). These are elaborated in six key features: continuity, contextual support, intersubjectivity, contingency, handover/ takeover, and flow ([van Lier, 2004](#)). *Continuity* refers to tasks connected to one another. *Contextual support* is associated with supportive learning environment. *Intersubjectivity* is formed by mutual engagement in nonthreatening participation. *Contingency* involves teacher support that tailors student understanding or learning. *Handover* or takeover is related to a shift of responsibility from the teacher to students over time. *Flow* involves a balance between skills and strategies that participants focus on a particular task performed in tune with others.

Three key features of scaffolding discussed in this paper include *contingency*, *fading of support*, and *transfer of responsibility from teacher to student*, as noted by van de Pol and colleagues ([2010](#)). The first feature of scaffolding is contingent support. The notion of contingency refers to the adjustment of teachers' scaffolding strategies based on the needs and English proficiency levels of different types of students ([Hammond & Gibbons, 2005](#)). Second, scaffolding is fading. In particular, scaffolding can be gradually reduced when students can perform their tasks independently as autonomous readers

(Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Third, it is the transfer of responsibility from teacher to student. As indicated previously, scaffolding refers to teachers' temporary support and can be gradually withdrawn when students are able to accomplish a similar task on their own. The ultimate purpose of scaffolding, therefore, is to enhance students' independence in task accomplishment and achieve strategic readers ([Reynolds & Daniel, 2018](#); [van Lier, 1996, 2004](#)).

2.3.2 Scaffolding reading comprehension

Research has indicated that scaffolding influences and improves students' reading comprehension ([Enyew & Yigzaw, 2015](#); [Gibbons, 2002](#)). According to Gibbons (2002), strategies and activities used for reading classroom should be taught before, during and after reading. These should include two purposes: (1) enables students to comprehend what they are reading, (2) students are able to use strategies to deal with the text.

Scaffolded reading experience is another type of support for students' text comprehension ([Clark & Graves, 2004](#); [Fitzgerald & Graves, 2005](#)). This practice can be used to facilitate reading comprehension for all grade levels by organizing the reading process into smaller stages. The purpose of breaking down activities, namely pre-, during, and post-reading is to reduce students' burden on meaning-making process.

2.4 Pre-reading activities (PRAs)

As indicated earlier, lack of topic-related prior knowledge is deemed to be a major issue that interferes students' reading comprehension. Research indicates that pre-reading activities can be a potential tool for tackling with above-mentioned issue. However, majority of teachers tend to ignore the effects of pre-reading activities that encourage students' understanding of text messages ([Ajideh, 2003](#)). This shows a need to be explicit about exactly what is meant by 'pre-reading activities' and their contributions in the reading process.

There are several definitions of pre-reading activities (PRAs) in the literature. PRAs refer to activities used by teachers to support student comprehension of texts prior to reading ([Alemi & Ebadi, 2010](#); [Wilén & Clegg, 1986](#)). These activities are the first of the questioning strategies that allow students to begin reading a given text ([Amalia & Devanti, 2016](#)). PRAs can serve several functions, including motivating student interest, activating their prior knowledge ([Ajideh, 2003](#); [Nuttall, 2005](#)) and pre-teach reading concepts and vocabulary ([Wilén & Clegg, 1986](#)). In addition, PRAs can be used to focus on the purpose for reading and help students identify the gist of a text ([Amalia & Devanti, 2016](#)) while previewing the reading ([Alyousef, 2005](#)) or informing the teacher of what their students need to know or learn ([Hashemi, Mobini, & Karimkhanlooie, 2016](#)).

2.5 Questioning at pre-reading stage

Questioning at pre-reading stage refers to the instructional mode that stimulates student thinking, learning, and participation in class (e.g., [Ajideh, 2003](#); [Hill, 2016](#);

[Wilén & Clegg, 1986](#)). According to [Ajideh \(2003\)](#), questioning, generated by the teacher or student, is one type of top-down processing activities which should be done before reading. This strategy addresses content delivery and directions for students to know what to do or how to do with questions during pre-reading ([Amalia & Devanti, 2016](#)). Questions refer to a process which the teacher poses and gives students feedback based on their responses ([Zhang, 2018](#)). Specifically, this definition helps distinguish questions posed by the teacher from those generated by the student. For the purpose of this study, questioning is defined as questions asked or generated by the teacher rather than by the student before reading. Given the role and nature of questioning as a high level cognitive strategy in teaching and learning of foreign languages ([Davoudi & Sadeghi, 2015](#)), particularly English, the questioning strategy the teacher uses at pre-reading stage needs to be practiced and maintained while scaffolding students' comprehension of texts. It is therefore indispensable for teachers to consider the question type that can involve students in their learning process for enhanced text comprehension.

2.5.1 Teachers' question types

The definition and characteristics of two question types, namely open-ended and closed-ended questions, adapted from Lee and Kinzie ([2012](#)), are presented in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Characteristics & examples of open vs. closed teacher questioning

Question type	Open-ended question	Closed-ended question
Definition	A question leads to variety of acceptable responses/ answers which the teacher does not know.	A question expects one possibly acceptable response. The teacher already knew the answers and asked if students know the answers.
Cognitive level	Higher cognitive skills (prediction, reasoning)	Lower cognitive skills (recognition, recalling of facts)
Characteristics	Low-constraint detailed and extended answers	High-constraint short, simple answers
Synonym	Referential questions	Display questions Yes/ no questions and 'Or' questions
Example	What kinds of energy will we use in the future?	Do you like travelling into space?

2.5.2 Questioning and students' comprehension of texts at pre-reading stage

Several studies have addressed the effects of using questions as a pre-reading activity on students' reading comprehension (e.g., [Amalia & Devanti, 2016](#); [Hashemi et al., 2016](#); [Thongyon & Chiramanee, 2011](#); [Tran & Phuong, 2018](#)). An experimental study was conducted by Thongyong and Chiramanee ([2011](#)) on 60 students of grade 9 at Muslim Witaya Phuket, Thailand to compare the students' reading ability after using two pre-reading activities, namely guessing reading content from pictures and questioning. It

was found that after the intervention, participating students performed better in the post-test and that they had positive attitudes towards the former.

A study by Sunggingwati and Nguyen (2013) examining the practice of teacher questioning in reading class at a secondary schools in Indonesia, revealed that the teachers used questions in the pre-reading sessions to introduce students the topic and recall their background knowledge. The findings also indicated that during pre-reading stage, the teachers mainly used open-ended questions rather than yes/ no questions and chose the questions they asked basing on the suggested questions from textbooks rather than generated questions by themselves. Moreover, teachers were exposed to low-level questions.

A study by Pham and Hamid (2013) was conducted to investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs about quality questions and their questioning practice regarding questioning purposes and students' cognitive level. Findings show that there was a difference between teachers' beliefs and their practices. Specifically, teachers held the beliefs that questions in reading lessons were employed to check students' memory of the previous lesson, create students' interests and motivation, give students prompts, and promote students' critical thinking. In actual practices, the teachers posed questions to draw students' attention to the topic.

A comparative study undertaken by Tran and Phuong (2018) investigated the impact of questioning and semantic map in pre-reading stage on 52 EFL gifted grade 12 students' reading comprehension within the Vietnamese context. Data collected in their study include tests and interviews. The findings reveal that both questioning and semantic map yielded positive impact on students' reading comprehension.

3. Methodology

A descriptive study using mixed-methods approach was employed to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs and practices of scaffolding students' reading comprehension through questioning. The mixed-methods approach incorporates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to obtain detailed explanation of the topic under investigation (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

Quantitative approach using questionnaires was utilized to gain insights into teachers' beliefs about the implementation of the questioning technique to scaffold students' reading comprehension. Specifically, a 32-item questionnaire was divided into three main sections, regardless of the first section related to participants' personal information (gender and years of teaching experiences). Section Two of the questionnaire including ten items of two clusters looked into EFL teachers' understanding about scaffolding and its importance at pre-reading stage. All of 14 items in Section Three were categorized into four clusters, namely *Involvement, Usefulness, Motivation and Challenge*, adapted from students' views towards pre-reading activities (Thongyon & Chiramanee, 2011) and was used to investigate teachers' beliefs about scaffolding reading comprehension through pre-reading questioning. The Section

Four with eight items was employed to explore actual practices of questioning to scaffold at pre-reading stage.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with six open-ended questions shed light on teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of scaffolding in reading classes though questioning over a semester time. To triangulate the data sources, observations were conducted to further understand actual happenings of teachers' reading classes.

Sixty-four EFL teachers (44 females and 20 males) from eight lower secondary schools in the Mekong Delta participated in the study on the basis of two-stage random sampling (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Specifically, eight lower-secondary schools were selected from the accessible population: five schools in Dong Thap and three schools in Hau Giang. Eight teachers of English from each school were then selected.

4. Findings

4.1. Teacher beliefs of scaffolding reading comprehension at pre-reading stage (PRS)

4.1.1 Findings from the questionnaire

A. Teachers' understanding of scaffolding at PRS

Section Two of the questionnaire of ten items presents teachers' understanding of scaffolding concept and its importance at pre-reading stage, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: The percentage of teachers' response to the items in teachers' understanding

No.	Items	SD & D (%)	N (%)	SA & A (%)	Mean	SD
1	Scaffolding is to guide students to do tasks step by step.	17.2	6.3	76.6	3.66	1.04
2	Scaffolding is to aid students in completing the task with teachers' temporary support.	12.5	17.2	70.3	3.67	.93
3	Scaffolding is to facilitate the tasks through teacher-student interaction.	6.3	7.8	86	3.95	.76
4	Scaffolding is to divide a task into smaller parts.	11	14.1	75	3.78	.88
5	Scaffolding should be gradually reduced to help students increase their autonomy	14.1	20.3	65.6	3.75	.98
6	Scaffolding should be used timely and sufficiently.	0.0	1.6	98.4	4.39	.52
7	Scaffolding at PRS lightens students' making-meaning process.	6.3	6.3	87.5	4.08	.76
8	Scaffolding at PRS helps students know their purpose in reading.	3.1	7.8	89.1	4.11	.67
9	Scaffolding at PRS helps students activate their individualized experience.	1.6	17.2	81.3	4.05	.70
10	Scaffolding at PRS motivates students to follow the text.	4.7	23.4	71.9	3.88	.79

Note: SD & D = Strongly disagree & disagree; N = Neutral; SA & A = Strongly agree & agree

As can be seen from Table 4.1, the mean scores for each item were higher than the scale 3.5, an accepted mean for high level of agreement. Results indicate that the surveyed teachers had high level of understanding of scaffolding and its importance. Specifically, almost all of the teachers (98%) agreed that scaffolding should be used when necessary.

Over 89% of the teachers pointed out that students knew what to read in the upcoming text thanks to scaffolding at PRS. While 87.5 % of the teachers consented that scaffolding at PRS facilitated students' understanding, 86% of the teachers affirmed that teacher-student interaction was a way to scaffold students. 81.3 % of the teachers indicated that scaffolding at PRS contributed to activating students' prior experience. Moreover, scaffolding was recognized as a guide for students to complete a particular task step by step (76.6%) and in smaller stages (75%). 71.9% of the teachers believed that scaffolding at PRS could motivate students because this practice is viewed as teachers' temporary support, which made up 70.3 % of the teachers' agreement. Almost two-thirds of the teachers (65.6%) reported that scaffolding should be gradually removed to enhance students' autonomy.

B. Teacher beliefs of questioning as scaffolding reading comprehension at PRS

Section Three of the questionnaire consists of fourteen items with regard to teachers' beliefs about questioning as a scaffolding strategy, as indicated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: The percentage of teachers' response to the items in teacher beliefs

No.	Items	SD & D (%)	N (%)	SA & A (%)	Mean	SD
11	I believe questioning at PRS makes students more involved in reading.	3.1	4.7	92.2	4.06	.59
12	I believe questioning at PRS activates students' prior knowledge related to the text.	0.0	7.8	92.2	4.14	.53
13	I believe questioning at PRS makes students think more about the text.	1.6	9.4	89.1	4.05	.58
14	I believe questioning at PRS helps students predict the topic and contents of the text before reading.	0.0	12.5	87.5	4.16	.62
15	I believe questioning at PRS makes the contents of the text more familiar to students.	3.1	6.3	90.7	4.06	.61
16	I believe questioning at PRS facilitates students' reading comprehension.	4.7	15.6	79.7	3.95	.74
17	I believe questioning at PRS speeds up text comprehension.	7.8	17.2	75	3.81	.77
18	I believe questioning at PRS makes students curious about the upcoming text.	0.0	6.3	93.7	4.14	.50
19	I believe questioning at PRS makes students more confident to deal with the text.	6.3	20.3	73.5	3.77	.71
20	I believe questioning at PRS encourages students to learn from their friends' ideas.	10.9	29.7	59.4	3.58	.81
21	I believe questioning at PRS makes the classroom atmosphere more enjoyable.	12.5	21.9	65.6	3.64	.90
22	I believe questioning at PRS takes teacher a lot of preparation.	31.3	31.3	37.5	3.09	.94
23	I believe questioning at PRS is problematic in mixed-ability classes.	17.2	15.6	67.2	3.58	.97
24	I believe questioning at PRS is time-consuming.	15.7	21.9	62.5	3.56	.92

As can be seen from Table 4.3, the mean scores for each item were higher than the scale 3.5, an accepted mean for high level of agreement. Results reveal that teacher held strong beliefs about the effectiveness of questioning to scaffold students' reading comprehension. Specifically, almost all of the teachers (93.7%) agreed that questioning technique at PRS made students curious about the upcoming text and that this practice got students more involved in reading (92.2%) and activated their prior knowledge to deal with a particular text (92.2%). Likewise, most of the teachers believed that questioning at PRS could help familiarize students with the text contents (90.7%) and that this pre-reading practice made students think more about the text (89.1 %). 87.5 % of the teachers agreed that this questioning technique enabled students to predict the topic and contents of the text before reading. 79.7% of the teachers agreed that questioning at PRS facilitated students' reading comprehension. 75 % of the teachers agreed that this technique speeded up text comprehension. While 73.5% of the teachers believed questioning at PRS made students more confident to deal with the reading text, 67.2% of the teachers reported that this pre-reading practice was problematic in classes of mixed-ability students. Similarly, 62.5% of the teachers reported that questioning was time-consuming. This technique was believed to make the classroom atmosphere more enjoyable (65.6%). 59.4% of the teachers indicated that questioning at PRS encouraged students to learn from peer. Only 37.5% of the teachers thought that it took them much preparation to practice this technique.

4.1.2 Findings from the interviews

A. Insights into teachers' understanding of scaffolding reading comprehension at PRS

Analysis from the interview data revealed that the six participating EFL teachers showed varying beliefs that reflected their understandings of scaffolding as teachers' support in language teaching. Specifically, four interviewed teachers have known about scaffolding before participating in this study. For instance, Cuc and Lan shared their views:

"I think scaffolding means teachers' facilitation of their student learning." (Cuc, interview extract).

"Well, scaffolding is a kind of supporting provided by the teacher to make students feel secure when learning something." (Lan, interview extract).

Other two teachers, Mai and Truc, however, valued the importance of the support from the teacher although they did not know what 'scaffolding' means before. For example, Mai said,

"Offering students support is a way for them to continue to deal with upcoming reading tasks. Students can guess what the reading content is and this is useful for doing other tasks that follow." (Mai, interview extract)

When asked about the role of scaffolding at the pre-reading stage, all six teachers shared that scaffolding students' reading comprehension at the pre-reading stage was needed in text comprehension. The two following extracts illustrate their views.

"Well, I believe scaffolding at pre-reading stage is very important because it can arouse students' interest before they read the text. Once students find reading interesting, they are actually able to comprehend the text better." (Truc, interview extract)

Scaffolding students before reading a passage for the gist is necessary. (Lan, interview extract)

B. Insights into teacher beliefs of scaffolding reading through questioning at PRS

The four themes of the effectiveness of pre-reading questioning teachers believed include arousing students' interests, understanding the text better, brainstorming to activate students' prior knowledge and anticipating an upcoming text topic and content.

a. Arousing students' interests

Five of six participants said that questioning at PRS motivated students to read. The two extracts below illustrate their views.

"Before reading, asking students questions can appeal to them to the main part. You know, during reading, most of students are scared of reading whereas some are not scared but perhaps get bored. However, they find answering my questions is a way to get them reading in more detail although the reading has several new words." (Thuy, interview extract)

"Well, my students said they liked to answer the questions that lead to the reading." (Kiet, interview extract)

In contrast, Thy expressed her different view on asking students questions at PRS. She said,

"For high-achieving students, questions can encourage students to learn or get them interested in what the reading text is about. However, for lower-achieving students, I think questions are sometimes not a good way to motivate them at all." (Thy, interview extract)

b. Understanding the text better

Five participants reported that questioning at the pre-reading stage could somehow help students understand the text better. The two extracts below are examples that illustrate their views:

"When I ask students to discuss some questions, they can identify the general ideas related to the topic of the text." (Nam, interview extract)

"When students get familiar with the text and know what to read, they will understand that text better" (Thuy, interview extract)

c. Brainstorming to activate some aspects of students' prior knowledge.

When asked what questioning at pre-reading stage could help students learn a new text, four teachers believed that this technique could be a brainstorming strategy that make students think of how to connect what they learned to the text they were going to read. Examples of two teachers' views are presented below.

"I believe when I ask questions, my students have to think about ways to answer those questions in order to understand the text in more detail. I also think that asking such pre-reading questions enables students to have some time to prepare and brainstorm some topic-related ideas, or even relate to their knowledge or experience." (Gam, interview extract)

"When students feel curious and try to make a guess, that's the time when they relate to what they already known about that topic" (Cuc, interview extract)

d. Anticipating the upcoming text's topic and content

Three of six participating teachers claimed that posing questions at pre-reading stage was likely to assist students in guessing the topic and content of a particular text. The following extracts illustrate their views.

"First, I think this scaffolding tool can make students curious and guess the possible the topic and content of the upcoming text." (Nghia, interview extract)

"Student can imagine how the outline or the content of the text is" (Thuy, interview extract)

"Students will know what they are going to learn, and they basically predict the content of the upcoming text" (Kiet, interview extract)

4.2. Teachers' practices of scaffolding reading comprehension through questioning at PRS

4.2.1 Findings from the questionnaires

Section Four of the questionnaire consists of eight items which indicate teachers' practices of the implementation of questions to scaffold students' reading comprehension, as indicated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: The percentage of teachers' response to the items in their practices

No.	Items	Never & Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Usually & Always (%)	Mean	SD
25	I ask questions to draw students' attention to the topic.	1.6	14.1	84.4	4.05	.65
26	I ask follow-up questions to trigger students' responses.	1.6	28.7	70.4	3.86	.73
27	I ask questions to recall students' prior knowledge related to the topic.	1.6	20.3	78.2	3.98	.70
28	I ask questions review vocabulary students already known.	3.1	29.7	67.2	3.84	.76
29	I ask questions to require students to predict the content.	6.3	25.0	68.8	3.82	.79
30	I use questions to ask students to explain information.	12.5	39.1	48.5	3.42	.79
31	I use open-ended questions to scaffold.	4.7	34.4	60.9	3.67	.74
32	I use closed-ended questions to scaffold.	28.1	45.3	26.6	3.03	.84

As shown in Table 4.12, approximately 85% of the teachers said that they asked questions to draw students' attention to the topic. 78.2 % of the teachers asked questions to recall students' prior knowledge related to the topic, followed by those who asked follow-up questions to trigger students' responses (70.4%). 68.8% of the teachers indicated that they posed questions to students for predicting text content. 67.2 % of the teachers asked questions to review vocabulary that students already known. Nearly half of the respondents (48.5%) agreed that they used questions to ask students for clarification of text information. While two-thirds of the teachers (64.57%) said that they used open-ended questions to scaffold their students' reading comprehension, only a about one-third (26.6%) indicated that they used closed-ended questions.

4.2.2 Findings from interviews

The interview data show the three reasons for teachers' preferences in using open-ended questions to scaffold their students' reading comprehension at the pre-reading stage. Three themes identified include students' English language proficiency level, topic familiarity, and their personality.

a. Students' English language proficiency

When asked the reasons for their choice of open-ended or closed-ended questions at the pre-reading stage, four participating teachers shared their concern about students' English proficiency level. One of the teachers shared her views:

"Questions to some extent can enable low-achieving students to take part in learning activities. For high-achieving students, they do not find questions a challenging task or activity before reading. However, it took some time for low-achieving students to think of seeking answers to questions, particularly open-ended ones." (Hong, interview extract)

b. Topic familiarity

Three out of six teachers expressed their concerns about the topic familiarity that corresponds to the students' English language proficiency level. For example, Phuong said,

"I sometimes have to think of how to use the topic that is familiar with my students. That depends on students' English level, I choose the easy or difficult for individual students in my class." (Phuong, interview extract)

C. Students' personalities

Two out of six teachers added another reason to choose the type of questions they asked in reading lessons. For instance,

"In general, I consider students' personalities. If the majority of students are active, I can ask them more open-ended questions to encourage them to share ideas. For students who are shy and reluctant to share ideas, I use closed-ended questions" (Loan, interview extract)

4.2.3 Findings from the observations

The implementation of questioning, notably open and closed-ended questions was observed through observations over the time of the study. Table 4.4 shows the distribution of question types.

Table 4.4: Distribution of question types

Teachers and Topics	Question types		Total questions
	Open-ended questions	Closed-ended questions	
Teacher 1: Types of energy	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	8 (100%)
Teacher 1: Travelling around Viet Nam	8 (73%)	3 (27%)	11 (100%)
Teacher 1: A space trip	4 (57%)	3 (43%)	7 (100%)
Total questions	14 (54%)	12 (46%)	26 (100%)

Table 4.4 indicates that open-ended questions were the question type teachers most frequently asked to scaffold students' reading comprehension at the pre-reading stage, which made up 54 % of the total questions, followed by closed-ended questions (46%). The following scenarios illustrate two types of questions teachers used.

Scenario 1

The teacher asked students to play 'Kim's game' in order to review vocabulary about 'sources of energy'. After recalling vocabulary and the topic students learnt in the previous lesson, Before lead-in of the lesson, the teacher began her lesson by asking some questions. In the following example, the teacher tried to relate students to their background knowledge about "Kinds of energy". For example,

T: "How many kinds of energy do you know?" (Closed-ended question)

S: "Two."

T: "Yes. What are they?" (Closed-ended question)

S: "Renewable and Non-renewable."

T: "What are renewable energy sources?" (Closed-ended question)

S: "Solar, wind, hydro and nuclear."

T: "That's good. And what are non-renewable sources?" (Closed-ended question)

S: "Oil, natural gas."

T: "That's good."

The teacher then pre-taught vocabulary related to the text. After that, she asked students to look at a picture in the textbook and ask additional questions related to the lesson. For example, the teacher used closed-ended questions to elicit the visual aid, she then asked more open-ended questions to lead the students to the main topic and predict possible ideas in the passage.

T: "What is the source?" (Closed-ended question)

S: "Nuclear, oil."

T: "Yes. What's this?" (T is pointing to the picture) (Closed-ended question)

S: "Solar."

T: "What are the main sources of energy in VN?" (Open-ended question)

S: "I think solar."

S: "Oil."

T: "That's right. You?"

S: "Coal."

T: "What kinds of sources will we use in the future?" (Open-ended question)

S: "Solar, wind."

T: "Minh."

S: "Water or hydro."

T: "I'd like you to open your book on page 44. Read number 3 and check your answers."

Scenario 2

Before asking students to read a text about three places, namely Nha Trang, Da Lat and Sa Pa, the teacher posed some questions to get students talk about their favorite place. The following conversation is an example for that discourse.

T: *"Do you like travelling?" (Closed-ended question)*

S: *"Yes"*

T: *"What places do you want to travel?" (Open-ended question)*

S: *"Dalat."*

T: *"Why do you want to visit Dalat?" (Open-ended question)*

S: *"Because it's beautiful."*

T: *"So what sight is beautiful?" (Open-ended question)*

S: *"It has jungles, waterfalls."*

T: *"What other destination do you like?" (Open-ended question)*

S: *"Ha Noi."*

T: *"Why do you want to visit to Hanoi?" (Open-ended question)*

S: *"Because it's very famous."*

T: *"What is it famous for?" (Open-ended question)*

S: *"There are Hoan Kiem lake, Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum."*

T: *"Do you like to visit to Nha Trang?" (Closed-ended question)*

S: *"Yes."*

T: *"Tell me why?" (Open-ended question)*

S: *"Because I love sand beaches...and seafood."*

T: *"How can you go to Nha Trang?" (Open-ended question) "Can we ride a bike?" (Closed ended question)*

S: *"No, we travel by bus or car."*

5. Discussion

This section discusses the key findings of the study in relation to relevant studies to answer the two research questions.

Research Question One: *What are teacher beliefs about questioning to scaffold students' reading comprehension at pre-reading stage?*

With respect to its effectiveness in pre-reading stage, scaffolding was believed to highlight students' meaning-making process by leading them to a new topic related to some aspects of their prior knowledge. This finding is consistent with other studies by several researchers (e.g., [Enyew & Yigzaw, 2015](#); [Gibbons, 2002](#)). A possible explanation of this claim is that lack of prior knowledge is the challenge in this teaching context.

Participating teachers held the beliefs that posing questions before reading could assist students in arousing their interests to introducing a new lesson topic. However, one interesting view was that proficient or high-achieving students were more

interested in the questioning strategy than less proficient or low-achieving ones. This finding is in line with a study by Chi (2007) who confirms that high-achieving students prefer collaborating with the teacher in order to negotiate meanings while low-achieving students tend to focus on what is presented in the text. It may be that teacher-student interaction might cause anxiety amongst less proficient students.

Furthermore, participating teachers believed that pre-reading questioning was a useful scaffolding strategy to assist students in connecting their individual experience to the text. This finding is therefore in line with previous studies by several scholars (Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013; Thongyon & Chiramanee, 2011). These authors contend that questioning before reading is useful for recalling students' existing knowledge. A possible explanation for these claims is that extending understanding of a specific text passage related to previously known knowledge may create meaningful learning amongst students. As meaningful learning occurred at pre-reading stage, it could allow students to become active learners in their reading process.

The findings from the interviews reveal that students who feel curious about the upcoming text are likely to get benefit from this strategy. This finding is consistent with Tran and Phuong (2018) who claim that stimulating students' curiosity contributes to facilitating their comprehension. One explanation for this is that students' curiosity could drive them to make guesses about the topic of a given text through pre-reading questions. Such questions while reading the text lead students to close scrutiny of the upcoming passage.

Research Question Two: *What are teachers' practices of questioning to scaffold students' reading comprehension at pre-reading stage?*

With regard to the question types, open-ended questions were reported to be the most frequently used by the participating teachers at pre-reading stage to scaffold students' reading comprehension. These surveyed teachers indicated that this type of question could draw their students' attention to the topic. This finding is consistent with other studies in the literature (L. N. K. Pham & Hamid, 2013; Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013). These authors revealed that this type of brainstorming activity related to higher cognitive skills could spark students' interest.

The findings from the interviews reveal some possible reasons for the preference of open-ended questions in actual practices, namely students' English language proficiency level, topic familiarity, and their personality. With regard to topic familiarity, this factor could influence not only students' comprehension but also further understanding in more familiar tasks, as noted by Gass and Varonis (1984) and Rahimpour and Hazar (2007). One possible explanation for this reading task topic could be fact that open-ended questions provide students with opportunities to take part in learning activities and that participating teachers preferred to employ open-ended questions to scaffold low-performing students in this setting.

6. Conclusions

The findings from this present study provide insights into teacher beliefs and practices of questioning as a beneficial scaffolding strategy in helping students in text comprehension. Their beliefs lay the groundwork for teachers' choice of question types in actual practices. In light of these findings, some pedagogical implications are made.

It is recommended that lower secondary school teachers should consider the teacher-student interaction as the core component of questioning while encouraging students to actively involve in their reading process. Cognizant of the importance of questioning before reading, there is a need to timely scaffold students' practices based on their needs, preferences, and English language proficiency levels.

Students should be required to have frequent practice with additional reading sources or materials that they find encouraging and motivating at pre-reading session.

With regard to reading lesson plans, the application of questioning in a mixed-ability reading class can be problematic because of the fact that less proficient students may receive little support from teachers. Therefore, implementing a variety of pre-reading activities could be the possible solution. In particular, the combination of questioning and visual aids is likely to make the classroom atmosphere more enjoyable and easily accessible to low-achieving students.

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