

**INVESTIGATING TEACHER QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES IN ENGLISH
READING COMPREHENSION LESSONS IN MALAWI PUBLIC SECONDARY
SCHOOLS**

M.Ed. (CURRICULUM STUDIES - LANGUAGE EDUCATION) THESIS

CHRISPAL BOBZOLA DAMIANO FELESIANO CHITSUMBA

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

AUGUST, 2023



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By

CHRISPAL BOBZOLA DAMIANO FELESIANO CHITSUMBA

B.Ed. (Language)-University of Malawi

Submitted to the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Studies, School of Education,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education
in Curriculum and Teaching Studies (Language Education)

University of Malawi

August, 2023

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, acknowledgements have been made.

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Amos Moses Chauma, PhD (Senior Lecturer)

Main Supervisor

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Allan Lipenga, PhD (Associate Professor)

Co-Supervisor

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, Rebecca, for her great perseverance, support and patience throughout my studies. She stood by my side during academic pressure.

This work is also dedicated to my mother, Sofia Nampheta Simbi, and my uncle, Damiano Ching'ambe for their moral support during my studies. I am proud of you, mom and uncle.

This work is also dedicated to my children Lucy, Zione, Jaston, Griffin and Atusaye for suffering fatherly love during my study.

Most importantly, I dedicate this paper to Jehovah, for granting me the opportunity to study at the University of Malawi as well as giving me good health, zeal, strength and wisdom for the successful completion of my study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr Amos Moses Chauma, my thesis supervisor, and Associate Professor Allan Lipenga, the co-supervisor, whose supervision, constructive comments, criticisms and guidance have shaped this thesis up to this point. I am not taking it for granted for you have played a great role. May God bless you all the time.

I don't forget my two peers, Mercy Chitsulo and Oliver Maunda, for their encouragement and spiritual support during my study. You demonstrated unconditional love to me. May Jehovah's blessings be upon you always.

I also owe gratitude to my friend, Stenkly Gidala, for providing me with internet data bundles during research proposal development, and means of transport during data collection. Without your support, my study would be hard. Jehovah bless you abundantly.

ABSTRACT

Questioning is one of the techniques of teaching English reading comprehension. Teachers' quality of questioning impacts on students' existing thinking and reasoning skills. This study investigated how teacher questioning is used to enhance students' critical thinking skills in English reading comprehension in selected Malawian secondary schools. Using a qualitative case study research design, data were collected using classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed thematically using Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. The findings of the study revealed that teachers of English have knowledge concerning lower and higher levels of teacher questions, but are unable to categorise them into six levels of educational objectives. Some reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension are the following: testing evaluation level of educational objectives is almost neglected; inadequate lesson preparation, and inability to categorise the two levels of questions into six levels of educational objectives. The implications of these findings are that teachers of English are unlikely to use questioning to enhance development of students' critical thinking because their question sequencing fails to follow levels of educational objectives. Neglecting testing the highest level of educational objectives may result in reduction in development of students' critical thinking, and lesson preparation is likely to suffer and the use of different levels of teacher questions to enhance students' critical thinking will not be realised.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS /ACRRONYMS

CEED	Central East Education Division
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
E F L	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as Second Language
FTFI	Face to face interview
M I E	Malawi Institute of Education
MANEB	Malawi National Examinations Board
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Education

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter discusses the background to the study in relation to English reading comprehension. The study investigated how teachers of English use questioning techniques in English reading comprehension. I was very much interested in levels of teacher questions used during the reading time in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi secondary schools. The chapter also presents the statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, and the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background to the study in relation to reading comprehension

In Malawi public secondary schools, reading is one of the core elements in the English language curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2013). Principally, the teaching of reading aims to enable learners have the ability to understand and interpret content of written texts as efficiently as possible (Akkaya & Demirel, 2012; Muayanah, 2014).

Literature indicates that reading comprehension is affected by reader characteristics such as prior knowledge and disposition to learn; passage characteristics such as text structure and conceptual density; and social dynamics such as cultural norms (Cunningham & Moore, 1993).

This implies that, in reading comprehension, meaning is constructed when readers make connections between what they know and the reading text (McLaughlin, 2012). However, it appears that, despite having similar reader characteristics and reading the same passages, readers understand same texts differently. Resultantly, in a reading comprehension classroom, reader characteristics are complemented by reading comprehension tasks (Cunningham & Moore, 1993).

Completing reading comprehension tasks helps teachers to measure learners' understanding of a reading text because comprehension of a text is not directly observable (Brown, 2000). This implies that tasks which students complete with a reading passage affect their understanding of a reading text (Cunningham & Moore, 1993).

Questioning is one of English reading comprehension tasks. In English reading comprehension, teachers use questions to assess learning as well as to promote reading comprehension (Broek, et al., 2001). Liang, Watkins, Graves and Hosp (2010) contend that questioning aids students both in literal comprehension of a text, more so in critically thinking about a text read. This suggests that language teachers use questions to promote reading comprehension skills (Broek, et al., 2001).

To emphasise the need for questioning in Malawi public secondary schools, the syllabus for English forms 1 and 2 (MoEST, 2013) and syllabus for English forms 3 and 4 (MoEST, 2013) attest to the fact that question-and-answer is one of the teaching, learning and assessment methods in English reading comprehension.

Secondary school learners' overall performance in English reading comprehension questions in Malawi secondary schools is poor. This is evidenced in the performance of candidates in Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) Examinations yearly. For instance, in 2019, 49.64% failed due to poor performance in English (MANEB, 2019). This high failure rate could be partly due to poor performance in reading comprehension. This is because the practice of teacher questioning in the ESL reading comprehension classroom is critical in supporting student learning (Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013). As such, the teaching of English reading comprehension skills is important because test items of MSCE examinations in English reading comprehension paper greatly focus on the ability of examinees to comprehend written texts (Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013). Additionally, giving students terminal tests in line with MANEB format provides students with good practice of the national examinations questions (MANEB, 2018; Hayikaleng, Nair & Krishnasamy, 2016).

1.3 Statement of the problem

The teaching of English reading comprehension is important for the learners to understand content of subjects whose medium of instruction is English, and even more important, to understand examination questions in those subjects. It is known that most failures during MSCE examinations are based on candidates' failure to understand examination reading texts or examination questions presented in English. Therefore, use of teacher questions in the teaching of English reading comprehension provides students with good practice of the national examinations questions (MANEB, 2018; Hayikaleng, Nair & Krishnasamy, 2016).

However, it appears that, although teacher questioning is the most frequently used teaching strategy in teaching the English subject, secondary school students' overall performance in MSCE English examinations in reading comprehension remains poor (Kubota, 2011). It is from this background and the general practice in the English reading comprehension classroom that I was prompted to investigate teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools.

I accessed one related study done in Malawi. The study was conducted on reading in English in primary schools in Malawi. The findings showed that primary school learners performed poorly in inferential reading comprehension questions because they were used to answering reference questions which their teachers used to give them in class (Williams, 1993). The study also attributed learners' poor performance in English reading comprehension questions in Malawi primary schools to failure of teachers to teach reading for meaning making (Williams, 1993). However, literature on teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi secondary schools is unavailable to me, hence, the need for the current study to fill this gap.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to provide teachers with knowledge to assist them in making decisions about improving classroom instruction in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools.

1.5 Research questions

1.5.1 Main research question

The main research question was “How do teachers of English use questioning in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools?”

In this study, I argue that, during the reading time in English reading comprehension, if questions are asked and sequenced according Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives, students’ critical thinking skills development will be realised, hence, increased students’ opportunities to understand written texts better.

1.5.2 Specific research questions

The study was guided by the following specific questions:

1. What is the teachers of English in Malawi public secondary schools understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension?
2. What levels of questions do teachers of English use in English reading comprehension lessons?
3. Why do some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension lessons?

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is significant because its findings will likely add knowledge to the academia on teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi secondary schools. Use of the knowledge generated in this study will likely help teachers of English to impart English reading comprehension skills as well as critical thinking skills to their students. Both English reading comprehension skills and critical thinking

skills enable individuals to understand contents of examinable written texts in all subjects whose medium of instruction is English.

Understanding examinable written texts is likely to help students understand examinations' questions during national examinations; and enable them to give appropriate responses to examinations' questions in national examinations. Therefore, appropriate use of questioning in English reading comprehension is more likely to give candidates chances to practice examinations' techniques in the national examinations. Additionally, the knowledge will inform the Curriculum Development Department as well as the Ministry of Education on how to improve the teaching of English reading comprehension in secondary schools. Lastly, the knowledge will also help teacher educators to modify their teacher training programmes in questioning techniques.

1.7 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the introduction to the study in relation to reading comprehension. Chapter 2 reviews literature, and discusses the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 3 presents methodology of the study and its justifications. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides conclusions and implications of the findings of the study, recommendations and the area for further research.

1.8 Chapter summary

This background to the study has indicated reading as one core element in the syllabi for English in Malawi secondary schools. Furthermore, questioning is presented as one kind of activity which students complete in English reading comprehension lessons to help

them comprehend reading texts better. Additionally, the statement of the problem has established that, despite questioning being frequently used in the teaching of English reading comprehension, there is high students' failure rate in MSCE English examinations. The purpose of the study was to investigate teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons.

Specifically, the study aimed at ascertaining teachers' knowledge on levels of teacher questions; identifying levels of teacher questions used in English reading comprehension; and establishing reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate. The chapter has shown that the study is significant because it will help various stakeholders in improving teacher education in questioning, and resultantly helping students to understand reading texts and questions better. The next chapter reviews literature related to the study, and discusses the theoretical framework which informed the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Chapter overview

The first section of this chapter reviews literature in relation to teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension in order to enhance critical thinking in learners. The review discusses teachers' definitions of *teacher questioning*, purposes and importance of *teacher questioning*, levels of teacher questions as well as reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension lessons. Lastly, the review reveals the gap which the study intended to fill. The second section is a discussion of a theoretical framework which informed the study.

2.2 Literature review

The literature review explored the definition of teacher questioning, importance of questioning in English reading comprehension, teachers' understanding of levels of questions in English reading comprehension, levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons and the reasons why some levels of questions dominate in English reading comprehension.

2.2.1 Defining teacher questioning

Scholars have defined teacher questioning differently. For instance, Darn, Trainer and Çetin (2019) define questioning as a presentation of a statement that demands a response, except in the case of requests and suggestions. This definition leaves out the teaching and learning process.

John and Barbara (1990) view questioning as a method for constructing and presenting questions in order to promote effective discussions and learning or to elicit information. John and Barbara are silent on how questioning promotes learning in English reading comprehension lessons.

This study adopted John and Barbara's definition because, in English reading comprehension, questioning is intended to promote learning through verbal interactions among learners or between the teacher and learners. Thus, questioning is paramount in English reading comprehension because it promotes learning by guiding learners to understand reading texts. However, I did not access literature on teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi secondary schools.

2.2.2 Purposes of teacher questioning

Teacher questioning serves two main purposes, namely; teaching and testing (Broek, et al., 2001). Teacher questions which are intended for teaching are constructed in ordered sequences which lead to learners to pay particular attention to some aspects of a text (Broughton, et al., 2003). Question sequencing refers to a series of questions which are designed in a way that each question builds on the answer to the preceding one (Vogler, 2005). For example, questions may be sequenced to direct learners' attention to the literal

and inferential meanings of the text read. Such questions seek to cultivate different kinds of reading skills such as skimming and scanning (Broughton et al, 2003).

On the other hand, questions for testing tend to have a high proportion of questions directed at specific vocabulary items, and demand definitions or explanations rather than asking for inferences about meaning to be drawn from the reading text context (Broughton et al, 2003). Testing is a procedure for measuring knowledge, ability or performance of test takers (Arshad, Shakir & Ahmad, 2020). This implies that, testing helps to measure learners' degree of achieving educational objectives. Probably, this is why Broughton, et al. (2003) observe that questions for testing contribute to learners' success in public examinations by giving them the opportunity for practising examination techniques. This may be possible if teachers understand the cognitive levels of individual questions, and question sequencing (Barnes, 1979; Good & Brophy, 2000 as cited in Vogler, 2005). However, the studies focused on questions in general, hence, the need to study teachers use levels of teacher questions to accomplish purposes of questions in English reading comprehension.

2.2.3 Importance of questioning in reading comprehension

Scholars have written much about the importance of teacher questioning in reading comprehension. For example, Simile and Stewart (nd) observe that teacher questioning in reading comprehension fosters learners' understanding of the reading text. Thus, in reading comprehension lessons, teacher questioning during the reading time helps students to master contents of the text being read. A study done by (Broek, et al. (2001) in which they investigated the effects of inferential questioning, and of the timing of such questioning on narrative comprehension by 4th-, 7th-, and 10th-grade students and

college students, established that during-reading questioning facilitated college students' memory for information specifically targeted by the questions.

In music education, teacher questioning in reading comprehension enhances learning. A study conducted in Britain to evaluate the significance of teacher questioning in music composing classroom, revealed that teacher questioning scaffolded and encouraged learners' thinking and learning through dialogue (Major & Cottle, 2010). However, the study is silent on how questioning scaffolded learning, hence, the need for the current study.

In literature, questioning in reading comprehension enhances development of critical thinking. In a study done in United States of America on art criticism questioning strategy within the framework of Bloom's taxonomy, Hamblen (1984) found that, when questions were properly sequenced in the teaching of literature, they fostered student involvement in the lesson, and the development of complex levels of thinking.

2.2.4 Levels of English reading comprehension lesson where questions may be asked

During the time of teaching reading comprehension in English language, questioning can be done at three levels, namely; pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading. Pre-reading questions prepare students for the reading comprehension text by developing the curiosity to know contents of the reading passage (Wangru, 2016). During-reading time, questions enable students to follow the plot of the story, and to develop critical thinking by predicting the content of the passage (Wangru, 2016). Finally, post-reading questions facilitate comprehension of a reading text by enabling the readers to synthesise new knowledge with the pre-existed one, enrich their imagination, and improve their

creativity (Akkaya & Demirel, 2012). The studies fail to explain how levels of teacher questions are used to enable students to predict contents of the reading text. Additionally, since not all reading comprehension texts are short stories, the scholars exclude other genres of reading texts.

Understanding levels of individual teacher questions in English reading comprehension contributes to learner success in public examinations because the teacher questions for testing give learners opportunities to practise examination techniques in all subjects. This is because understanding the examinations questions in any subject likely helps candidates to respond to the examinations questions appropriately. This observation stresses the need for teachers of English to have both theory and hands-on experience in questioning techniques in English reading comprehension so as to have the ability to use questioning for successful learning (Broughton, et al., 2003; Barnes, 1979; Good & Brophy 2000 as cited in Vogler 2005; Mtunda & Safuli, 1997)

Usually, in textbooks, reading comprehension passages have pre-reading questions and post-reading questions (Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013). This implies that during-reading-time questions are, by any means, formulated by teachers. Therefore, this implies that the teachers' ability to ask questions when teaching reading comprehension is critical to learners' understanding of reading texts. Therefore, this study focused on during-reading time questions because I believed that such questions would reflect teachers' knowledge of teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension.

2.2.5 Functions of questions

Literature indicates that functions of reading comprehension questions are categorised into two, namely; display and referential (Meng, Zhao & Chattouphonexay, 2012). Display questions are those questions which require learners to recall memorised facts or textbook information which the teacher already knows. Such questions serve to elicit information, and to check learners' understanding, hence, requiring lower order thinking skills (Meng et al, 2012). On the other hand, referential questions require students to think beyond recalling, and help students to use higher order thinking skills (Meng et al, 2012).

Although referential questions provide an information gap for students to improve their critical thinking in English reading comprehension, studies indicate that teachers prefer using display questions to using referential questions (Wangru, 2016). This implies that preference of display questions reduces students' critical thinking by reducing their opportunities to at higher levels, hence the need to balance the two categories of questions. This study investigated how teachers of English use referential and inferential questions to enhance students' critical thinking in English reading comprehension.

2.2.6 Teachers' understanding of levels of questioning in English reading comprehension

Teachers' knowledge about levels of teacher questions is critical in teaching English reading comprehension. Therefore, understanding levels of teacher questions helps teachers to use questions purposively. Thus, understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension is instrumental in measuring educational objectives. Mtunda and Safuli (1997) assert that teachers need to ask questions for specific functions

(teaching and testing), and that the success of learners in tackling those questions purposively asked determines the success of the lesson. This assertion emphasises the need for teachers to understand levels of teacher questions because their knowledge is instrumental in successful teaching of English reading comprehension. This stresses the need for teachers of English to have both theory and hands-on experiences in questioning techniques in English reading comprehension so as to have the ability to use questioning for successful learning.

Literature indicates that teachers' knowledge on levels of questions differs from teacher to teacher for some reasons. For example, Khorsand (2009) cites quality of teacher training in questioning as a source of such a difference. This implies that teachers who undergo proper training in questioning are more knowledgeable about levels of teacher questions than those who undergo improper teacher training in questioning. In a study done in Britain, Darn, Trainer and Çetin (2019) found that teachers who were given little training in asking questions had little knowledge in questioning techniques. As a result, such teachers developed the questioning techniques themselves, hence, lacking enough knowledge about levels of questioning.

Teachers' knowledge on levels of questions also differs depending on continuing professional development (CPD) in-service training serving teachers attend. This implies that, serving teachers who attend CPDs on teacher questioning have more knowledge on levels of questions than those who do not. Morris and Chi (2020) conducted a study in the United States of America to investigate the efficacy of professional development in changing two middle school science teachers' questioning to include more questions that require deeper student responses. Findings revealed that teacher questioning after the

CPD showed a marked improvement in increasing the number of questions that required students to make inferences about the materials. Morris and Chi (2020) findings suggest the need for CPDs to serving teachers.

Teachers' knowledge on levels of the teacher questions is also dependent on teachers' experiences. This suggests that, teachers with vast experience in questioning are more likely to ask and sequence their questions according to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives during lesson presentation than novice teachers. Thus, teachers with vast experience are more likely to use questions to enhance learning. A study done in the United States of America on questioning skills for teachers revealed that teachers' experience played a role in teachers' decisions in questioning (Wilén, 1991). This because, during lesson presentation, questions are formed intuitively (Wilén, 1991).

Literature on how teachers of English in Malawi secondary schools understand levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons was absent to me. Therefore, in the current study, I was prompted to ascertain how teachers of English understand levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension.

2.2.7 Levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons

Studies show that teacher questioning may encourage learners to think critically and creatively about what they read (Bloom, et al., 1956; Schirmer & Woosley, 1987). Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy presents two levels of educational objectives at which questions may be asked, namely; lower level and higher level. Lower level questions are those questions which call for verbatim remembering of factual information previously learnt (Redfield & Rousseau, 1981). On the other hand, higher level questions are those

requiring that, mentally, the student manipulates bits of information previously learnt in order to create or support an answer with logically reasoned evidence (Khorsand, 2009; Mtunda & Safuli, 1997; Redfield & Rousseau, 1981; Muayanah, 2014).

Bloom et al (1956) categorise educational objectives into six levels at which questions may be asked, namely; knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Knowledge refers to the ability of learners to remember facts, concepts or principles (Conklin, 2005). Thus, in knowledge level questions, remembering textbook information is central. For instance, the question “*How many witches did Macbeth and Banquo meet?*” requires a learner to remember and retrieve textbook information.

Comprehension level questions are questions that test students’ ability to understand what they know and translate the known into their own words (Conklin, 2005). This means that, if students just copy the response from the reading passage, the question becomes of knowledge level. Thus, a question may belong to both knowledge and comprehension levels of educational objectives depending on whether the student has copied the response verbatim or paraphrased it. For instance, the question “*Can you summarise the passage in your own words?*” belongs to comprehension level of questions since the learner has to retrieve the answer from the reading text, and paraphrase it.

Application question are questions which test students’ ability to use the information learnt in new and concrete situations (Khorsand, 2009). This means that, in a reading comprehension lesson, questions help students to transfer knowledge learned to new and concrete situations. For example, the question “*Do you know anyone who was battered by his wife?*” is an application question because a learner has to apply what she or he has

read in the reading text to a new and concrete situation. Thus, information from a fiction is applied to a real life situation.

Analysis is the ability to break down the material such as concepts and rules learnt into its component parts so as to understand its organisation such as relationship between its parts (Khorsand, 2009). Khorsand (2009) observes that, in critical reading for an EFL class, analysis questions have to be asked during and after reading activities so as to encourage learners to understand the content and structure of the given reading text. The question “*What are the benefits of cannabis farming?*” is an analysis level question since its answers could be found by analysing its uses.

Synthesis level questions are questions which test students’ ability to put parts together in order to form a new whole (Khorsand, 2009). Khorsand (2009) cites predicting contents of a reading passage as one of the activities in which synthesis level of cognitive domain of educational objectives may be tested. The question “*Can you explain what would have happened if the French doctor was allowed to keep Kino’s pearl?*” is a synthesis question because, for a learner to answer that question she or he has to put together the French doctor’s character.

Evaluation is the ability of individual learners to judge contents of a reading passage (Khorsand, 2009). The question “*Describe the characters of Macbeth and Banquo?*” requires students to make their judgements about the characters’ behaviour, hence, belonging to an evaluation level of questions.

Scholars agree that many teachers use more lower order questions than higher order questions in English reading comprehension lessons because, among other reasons, lower

order questions are easy to formulate and to score even by inexperienced and untrained teachers. For example, in a study done Malaysia, Sardareh and Saad (2013) found out that, although the participating teachers were degree holders, most of the questions they asked were of lower level. In another study conducted in California on numbers and types of questions asked by teachers, Barnes (1979) observed that majority of the questions called for factual answers.

In another study on art criticism questioning strategy within the framework of Bloom's taxonomy, Hamblen (1984) noted that most questions posed in classrooms elicited recall responses. This is the case, despite the fact that higher order questions promote high level thinking skills in learners, and lower order questions require low level thinking skills (Arslan, 2006; Khorsand, 2009; Hamblen, 1984). Therefore, in this study, I intended to find out dominating levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension.

2.2.8 Reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension

Scholars give different reasons as to why some levels of teacher questions dominate. For example, in a study conducted in Shiraz-Iran, Khorsand (2009) identifies three reasons as to why some levels of teacher questions dominate over others. Firstly, he argues that lower level questions dominate because they are less time-consuming to generate, and easy to score than higher level questions. Khorsand (2009) observes that creating test items using Bloom's taxonomy requires time and effort, hence, time-consuming. As a result, teachers prefer generating lower level questions to generating higher level questions because lower level questions are easier and less time-consuming to formulate and to score than higher level questions. Mtunda and Safuli (1997) contend that

formulating higher order questions is difficult. As a result, most questions which teachers ask tend to be of lower level. The studies are not specific to English reading comprehension, hence, the need for the current study to fill the gap.

Secondly, Khorsand (2009) also identifies teachers' lack of knowledge on levels of teacher questions as another reason for the dominance of questions of one level in sets of questions. He observes that some teachers are mostly unaware of different cognitive levels of questions and learning. As such, they may focus on one level and ignore others unintentionally. Teachers' lack of knowledge on levels of teacher questions may be attributed to improper teacher training in questioning. In a study done Malaysia, Sardareh and Saad (2013) found out that, although the participating teachers were degree holders, most of the questions they asked were of lower level.

Teachers' assumption about their learners' abilities to answer questions may also make questions of one level to dominate. It is argued that, when teachers have low expectations about their learners' abilities to answer higher order questions, they resort to asking their students few or no higher order questions at all and vice versa (Khorsand, 2009). A study conducted in Thailand shows that some teachers think that their students cannot answer higher order questions despite the fact that some learners can do so (Meng, Zhao & Chattouphonexay, 2012). As a result, teachers consider knowledge and comprehension question levels more important than other question levels because they are sure their learners will likely manage to answer their questions correctly (Khorsand, 2009).

Teachers' assumptions seem to be triggered by learners' language proficiency. A study done in Thailand indicates that, if most of the learners have low language proficiency,

teachers are more likely to ask lower level questions for easy understanding and answering by their learners. On the other hand, if learners have high language proficiency, teachers are likely to ask a good number of higher order questions (Meng et al, 2012). The current study tried to find out why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension in Malawi secondary schools.

In summary, the literature reviewed indicated that questioning is used in teaching English reading comprehension. It also showed that teachers of English understand levels of questioning differently, and that questions are asked at different levels, but some levels dominate over others for some reasons. However, it appears that the literature was silent on teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools, hence, the justification for the current study.

2.3 Theoretical framework

Benjamin Samuel Blooms taxonomy of educational objectives informed the study. Bloom's taxonomy was used because it was developed for reading comprehension despite the fact that other disciplines use it as well (Bloom, et al., 1956). This taxonomy is a hierarchical system for ordering educational objectives from lower level to higher level, where each level requires a student's mastery of the skills below it (Bloom et al, 1956). Educational objectives are used to measure educational outcomes (Bloom et al, 1956). Thus, testers use educational objectives which they wish to measure to formulate test items. This implies that, at each level of the taxonomy of educational objectives, there are questions that can be asked to measure educational outcomes (Bloom et al, 1956; Khorsand, 2009).

Blooms taxonomy identifies six levels of educational objectives by which thinking skills may be developed and tested, namely; knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom et al, 1956). A revised Bloom's taxonomy renames the six levels of educational objectives as remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The highest level in the revised Bloom's taxonomy gives learners opportunities to create things using the knowledge learnt. In this study, I used the original Bloom's taxonomy because I considered the creating level as a rarely measured level in English reading comprehension lessons.

This taxonomy is categorised into lower cognitive or convergent questions and higher cognitive or divergent questions. Lower cognitive questions are those calling for verbatim remembering of factual information previously learnt (Bloom et al, 1956; Khorsand, 2009). Such questions correspond most closely to the levels of knowledge and comprehension of the taxonomy (Bloom et al, 1956; Khorsand, 2009).

On the other hand, higher cognitive questions are those questions which require that, mentally, the student manipulates bits of information previously learnt in order to create or support an answer with logically reasoned evidence. Such questions most closely correspond to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in Blooms taxonomy (Bloom et al, 1956).

The theory assumes that higher order thinking skills are built on lower order thinking skills and that developing higher order thinking skills in learners is critical to learners' academic success. This is because the theory posits that each level of questioning has a respective corresponding level of thinking in its respective responses (Bloom et al, 1956;

Dillon, 1982). Thus, lower level questioning correlates to lower level thinking skills, and vice versa, and that learners' development of critical thinking skills is dependent on mastery of lower level thinking skills.

These principles were useful in analysing how teacher questioning helps students use critical thinking skills to generate responses to inferential questions. As indicated in the literature review, inferential questions have multiple correct responses depending on the individual learners' background experiences on the reading text, and that responses to such questions are dependent on responses to preceding referential questions.

2.4 Chapter summary

First, the chapter has reviewed the already existing literature in relation to teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in secondary schools. The literature indicates that scholars have defined *questioning* differently, and that it is done either for teaching or for testing. The literature has also highlighted some of the importance of teacher questioning in English reading comprehension and other subjects. Additionally, it has noted that teacher knowledge on levels of questioning differs from teacher to teacher depending on some reasons, and that teachers know two levels of teacher questions, namely; lower order and higher order.

Furthermore, it is observed that many teachers prefer asking lower order questions to higher order ones due to some reasons like poor teacher training on questioning techniques and lack of CPDs. Last, the chapter has described Benjamin Samuel Bloom's taxonomy which informed this study. It has indicated that Bloom's taxonomy was used

because it was developed for reading comprehension. The next chapter presents the research methodology used in the current study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter discusses the methodology used to arrive at the findings of the study. In the chapter, research design, research site, data generation tools and sampling procedures which led to the findings of this study are described. Furthermore, the study's credibility and trustworthiness, ethical consideration and limitations are discussed.

3.2 Research design

In this study, I used case study research design. Five secondary school teachers of English were the cases. This research design was chosen because I sought to deeply understand the teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension in the selected secondary schools. Ary, et al. (2010) observe that the goal of case study research design is to understand a phenomenon deeply. In this study, three secondary schools in Kasungu were sampled. Teachers of English, especially those who were teaching English in Form One and Form Three classes and their students, purposively selected, in the sampled secondary schools were studied in their natural settings.

This study used mixed research methods. Qualitatively, I used case study research design, qualitative data collection tools (classroom observation schedule and semi-structured interview guide), and qualitative data generation methods (classroom observation and face to face interviews) (Fatch, 2002). Quantitatively, in the presentation and discussion of results, I used numerical data in identifying dominating levels of teacher questions (Creswell, 2009).

3.3 Population and sampling

In the study, I used two sampling procedures, namely; convenience sampling and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling was used to select research sites. This sampling procedure involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents, and continuing until the required sample size is obtained (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000 Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). Three secondary schools in Kasungu District, and two classes, Form One and Form Three classes, were studied. The decision to select secondary schools in Kasungu was arrived at because they were within reach of my work station, hence, cost effective (Walker, 2005).

Purposive sampling was used to select to select research participants. The researcher handpicks sampling units to be included in the sample on the basis of his judgment of their typicality. In this way, the researcher builds a sample which is satisfactory to their specific needs (Woolfolk, Hughest & Walkup, 2013). In this study, purposively, teachers of English, particularly those who were teaching in Form One and Form Three classes, and Form One and Form Three learners of English were selected as research participants. In total, I involved five teachers of English and their learners of English from the three selected secondary schools.

Purposive sampling was used to draw teachers and learners from groups of others (Walker, 2005). Form One and Form Three classes were chosen because I assumed that, although learners would be disturbed by the study in one way or another, they were not writing national examinations in the year of carrying out the study. Additionally, I decided to study the two classes in the sampled secondary schools because I believed that the sample would be sufficient to provide maximum insight and understanding of how teachers of English use questioning in English reading comprehension in Malawi public secondary schools.

3.4 Data generation methods

In the study, data were generated using two data generation methods, namely; classroom observation and face to face interviews as discussed in the sections that follow

3.4.1 Classroom observation

First, data were generated through classroom observation. This data generation method was chosen because it allowed me to generate data from primary sources in their natural settings (Bell, 2005). In this study, I observed thirteen English reading comprehension lessons to check how teachers use questioning to influence students' levels of thinking in English reading comprehension lessons. Initially, I intended to observe and record twenty-four lessons, but recorded thirteen only because other lessons were not on reading comprehension. Specifically, classroom observation was used to ascertain dominant levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. During classroom observations, data were recorded by video-recording and completing a classroom observation schedule, (Punch, 2009; Bell, 2005).

In the classroom observation schedule, I recorded levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. The schedule was in a form of a checklist (Bell, 2005). An observation checklist was used to check dominant levels of questions in the English reading comprehension lessons. To achieve this, I listed some common action verbs that indicate levels of questioning in Bloom's taxonomy. Bloom's taxonomy creates measurable verbs to help describe and classify observable knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours and abilities (Bloom et al., 1956). This method of data recording was chosen because I believed that it might minimise or eliminate the variations that may have arisen from data based on my individual perceptions of events and situations (Bell, 2005).

During classroom observation, video-recording was used to record English reading comprehension lessons because I believed that it would help me to review the lessons observed whenever verification of some information during data analysis and interpretation would be needed. I also believed that video-recording would help me capture information which might be missed when taking down field notes.

3.4.2 Face-to-face interviews

Another data generation method which was used in the study was face to face interview. In this study, the interview involved semi-structured open-ended questions. I intended to interview six teachers of English who would be teaching in Form One and Form Three classes during the study to understand their knowledge about teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in more depth (Creswell, 2009). However, five teachers were interviewed because, at School B, one teacher was teaching both Form One and Form Three classes. In particular, I used the interviews to understand teachers' knowledge about levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension,

and to appreciate the reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension lessons.

I conducted one-time interviews with each of the sampled teachers (Punch, 2009). In one-time interview, the researcher interviews each research participant once. This is economical in the sense that it serves time on the part of the researcher (Ary, et al., 2010).

Data generated through interviews were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim later after each interview. That was because I believed that audio recording was less distracting than taking down notes (Creswell, 2009).

In this study, face to face interviews were used for three reasons. First, they allowed me to modify the questions during the interview process (Creswell, 2009). Second, they were used to verify observations (Punch, 2009; Bell, 2005). Last, face to face interviews were used because they allowed me to make immediate follow-ups and clarifications of participants' responses by asking them some probing questions (Punch, 2009; Bell, 2005; Creswell, 2009).

3.5 Trustworthiness and credibility of the study

In this study, credibility issues were dealt with through triangulation, piloting and research participants' verbatim quotes (Anney, 2014; Creswell, 2009; Punch, 2009; Creswell, 2009). Credibility indicates that a particular research approach is consistent across different researchers and different studies (Punch, 2009).

3.5.1 Triangulation

Triangulation is a combination of two or more research methodologies to study the same phenomenon (Bell, 2005; Denzin, 1970 as cited in Jack & Raturi, 2006; Thurmond, 2001). In this case, research methodologies refer to data sources, data generation methods and theoretical perspectives (Creswell, 2009; Punch, 2009; Bell, 2005). In the current study, data sources were different teachers of English and their learners from different secondary schools; while data generation methods were classroom observation and face to face interviews. The study also varied data recording tools. It used a classroom observation schedule, an interview guide, a video-recorder, and an audio-recorder. The video-recorder and the observation schedule were used to record data generated during classroom observations. The interview guide and the audio-recorder were used to record data generated through face to face interviews.

Triangulation was used under the assumption that the weaknesses inherent in one approach could be counterbalanced through strengths in another (Jack & Raturi, 2006). Specifically, its purpose was to obtain confirmation of findings through convergence of different perspectives. The point at which the perspectives converge was seen to represent reality (Shenton, 2003).

3.5.2 Piloting

Piloting is the trying out of the proposed research procedures on a few participants prior to the implementation of the study (Bell, 2005). During piloting, particular research instruments are pretested (Gilbert, 2001). In this study, piloting was done in two secondary schools within Kasungu. The study was piloted because I believed that it would provide me with the opportunity to assess the appropriateness of the data

generation methods, and to refine research instruments (Sampson, 2004). In the study, two data generation tools, namely; classroom observation schedule and interview guide, and one data recording tool, a video recorder were pretested.

After the pretesting, some flaws were noticed. As a result, the interview guide and video-recording gadget were refined. The initial interview guide had three questions only which were similar to the three specific research questions. Upon realising that interviewees were giving limited information to the questions, I added some probing questions to specific research question 1. On the part of the video-recording gadget, I transferred some contents to a computer so that it had enough space for video-taping. This followed a failure of the gadget to function properly due to an inadequate space which was available.

3.5.3 Research participants' verbatim quotes

In the study, data generated through interviews were transcribed verbatim (Ary, et al, 2010). Verbatim quote refers to recording of the exact words spoken by the speaker. As indicated in the data generation methods section, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed later. I believed that transcribing data generated through interviews verbatim would likely help mitigate bias because changing words or phrases might change the sense of meaning of what the research participant would have said (Ary, et al, 2010).

3.6 Ethical consideration

I ensured conformity to research ethics by doing four things. Firstly, research participants (teachers) were informed about the aim, procedure and duration of the research and the importance of their participation (Creswell, 2009). Secondly, the participants were assured that the information they provided would be used solely for the study, and that

they should participate in the study voluntarily. Creswell (2009) and Punch (2009) contend that participants must voluntarily agree to participate in the research and must know what their participation entails.

Thirdly, I concealed participants' identities by using letters of the alphabet for names of selected secondary schools, and by using codes for teachers' names. Therefore, the three research sites were named School A, School B and School C; teachers who were teaching English in Form One were coded 1, and those who were teaching English in Form Three were given the code 2. Fraenkel (2008) suggests that the identity of all participants in a qualitative study should be protected. Creswell (2009) and Punch, (2009) support Fraenkel by arguing that researchers need to protect their subjects, and develop trust with them if they are to collect rich data. Lastly, I sought clearance from University of Malawi administration, Central East Education Division (CEED) Manager's office, the school administrators of the sampled secondary schools, and the sampled teachers of English. It must be highlighted that while clearance from Chancellor College administration and CEED Manager's office were in writing, secondary school administrators and teacher participants gave their consents verbally.

3.7 Limitations to the study

The study met one limitation. During the third week of classroom observation, all the three research sites were affected by COVID-19 pandemic. At School A, both teachers and some students under study showed some signs of COVID-19. Although they were not medically tested for the virus, they went into self-isolation for fourteen days. At School B, the teacher under this study escorted his sick aunt to a hospital. When his aunt was diagnosed corona virus positive, the teacher participant went into a fourteen-day self-

quarantine as well. At School C, seven teachers and forty students were diagnosed corona virus positive. One of the teachers was the study's research participant. Resultantly, the affected teacher and students went in self-quarantine, too. Therefore, the study data collection halted for two weeks, and resumed later in a revision week.

3.8 Data analysis and interpretation

In data analysis, I used thematic analysis. During data analysis and interpretation, three things were done. First, the data generated during interviews and related to the study were transcribed verbatim before analysis. Second, all data generated during classroom observations and interviews were summarised in themes related to the research questions. Last, all the data collected were analysed in depth in relation to resolving the research questions (Fraenkel, 2008).

The analysis presented detailed descriptions of the settings (English reading comprehension classes) and individuals (Form One teachers of English and Form Three teachers of English) in relation to teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension. Inductively, the analysis involved building from particulars to general themes and interpreting the research data (Creswell, 2009). Idiographic interpretation was utilised. This involved interpreting data in regard to the particulars of a case rather than generalisations (Creswell, 2009). Shenton (2003) observes that,

“Results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organisation or organisations and, perhaps, geographical area in which the fieldwork was carried out (p. 70).”

Shenton agrees with Creswell (2009) that data in qualitative research should be interpreted within the context in which the study is carried out.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has described the research design, population and sampling, data generation methods and research tools which were used to generate the study's data. In the study, I used case study research design; convenience sampling to select secondary schools, and purposive sampling to select research participants. I have indicated that two data generation methods, namely; semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were. In semi-structured interviews, two data collection tools, namely; an interview guide and audio-recorder were used, whereas in classroom observation, I used an observation schedule and a videorecorder.

The chapter has also indicated that data were analysed using thematic analysis, and credibility and trustworthiness were ensured through triangulation, piloting and verbatim quotes. Furthermore, the chapter has indicated that ethical issues were ensured by informing research participants about the aim and duration of the study; concealing research participants and research sites' identities; and seeking clearance from University of Malawi administration, CEED Manager's office, school administrators, and teachers. The chapter has also presented one limitation to this study: all the research sites were affected by COVID-19 pandemic. The next chapter discusses the results of research findings.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study based on participants' responses to the interview guide questions, and classroom observations on how teachers of English in secondary schools use teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers of English use questioning in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools.

The main research question was “How do teachers of English use questioning in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools to promote critical thinking?” To answer this main research question, the following three specific research questions were asked:

1. How do teachers of English in Malawi public secondary schools understand levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension?
2. What levels of questions do teachers use in English reading comprehension lessons?
3. Why do some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension lessons?

Data were generated through classroom observation and face to face interview. 13 English reading comprehension lessons were observed. Since I was interested in questions asked during the reading time, all questions analysed in this thesis were asked during the time. Therefore, the analysis is based on 11 lessons because, despite the 13 lessons being on English reading comprehension, in 2 lessons, teachers did not ask any questions during the reading time. It must be mentioned here that, in all lessons except one, reading was done aloud. In the lesson where students read silently, and another lesson where reading aloud was done, no questions were asked during the reading time.

In some lessons where reading aloud was done, teachers read the texts, while in others students did the reading. In both cases, a reader would read a section and pause. Then, the teacher would ask a question basing on the section read. After answering the question, reading had to continue. Length of sections varied depending on individual teacher's choice on where to ask questions. Therefore, a minimum section was a phrase, and maximum comprised paragraphs.

After generating data through classroom observations and face to face interviews, I analysed them using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was done in order to identify patterns and develop categories under different themes that emerged from the participants' responses from each question of the interview guide, and classroom observations. The themes were the bases for interpretation of meaning of the data generated. Presentation of the findings has been done following question by question. Under each question, there are themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of the data as discussed in the findings.

The first research question was intended to investigate how teachers of English in Malawi public secondary schools understand levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension as presented under the following theme:

4.2 Teachers' understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension

In the first research question, I investigated teachers' understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. This section presents and discusses three subthemes, namely; teacher participants' definitions of teacher questions, their understanding of relationships between lower order questions and higher order questions, question sequencing and their knowledge on importance of asking during-reading questions.

To answer this specific research question, I used both classroom observations as well as face to face interviews. During face to face interviews, question 1b in the interview guide was "How many levels of teacher questions do you know? Name them?" Table 1 below lists participants' knowledge on number of levels of teacher questions.

Table 1: Teacher participants' knowledge on number of levels of teacher questions

Teacher 1 School A	<i>These lower order and higher order</i>
Teacher 2 School A	<i>Levels of questions are lower order and higher order</i>
Teacher 1 School B	<i>They are lower order and higher order</i>
Teacher 1 School C	<i>They are two: lower order and higher order</i>
Teacher 2 School C	<i>I think its lower order and higher order</i>

The above findings of the study reveal that teacher participants partially understood levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. From the analysis of interview data, the findings show that all the five teachers mentioned two main levels of questions, namely; lower order and higher order. However, from the analysis of interview data, the findings also show that none of the five teachers of English categorised lower order questions and higher order questions into six levels of educational objectives as stipulated in Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, et al. 1956). Failure to categorise the two levels of questions into six levels of educational objectives may be attributed to teacher participants' inadequate knowledge on questioning techniques.

4.2.1 Defining levels of teacher questions

After mentioning the two levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension, teacher participants were asked to define lower order questions and higher order questions. Findings showed that teacher participants defined lower order questions differently as tabulated in table 2.

Table 2: Verbatim quotes on teacher participants' definitions of lower order questions

Teacher	Definition
Teacher 1 School A	<i>Lower order questions just trigger learners to apply what is readily available in their minds.</i>
Teacher 2 School A	<i>Lower order questions are those questions which do not require students to think much.</i>
Teacher 1 School B	<i>Lower order questions are those questions which students do not have difficulties in answering.</i>
Teacher 1 School C	<i>Lower order questions are those that require students to name, mention.</i>
Teacher 2 School C	<i>A lower order question is that question which requires students to answer in a single line or they are a bit simpler than higher order questions.</i>

Source: Field data, 2021

From their definitions of lower order questions, one sense was common: simple to answer. Therefore, it can be inferred that teachers under this study viewed lower order questions as those questions which are simple for students to answer. Thus, the participants suggest that, if students struggle to answer a question, that particular question becomes higher order, but if they manage to provide a correct response without struggling, the question is categorised as lower order.

From the definition by Teacher 1 School A, it can also be implied that answers to lower order questions are readily available either in the reading text or in the learners'

experiences (in their minds). As a result, learners' need little effort to get the answer. One teacher demonstrated his knowledge on knowledge level questions by giving examples of lower order questions which are used to test knowledge level of educational objectives, namely; 'name' and 'mention'. Thus, it is simple for a learner to name or mention something she or he has heard of, seen or read about.

Additionally, to demonstrate his understanding of lower order questions, Teacher 1 School B cited the question "*What is malaria?*" as a lower order question because, he said, students had to use some knowledge of signs of malaria for them to respond to it. This may imply that since malaria is a common disease in the research site, each learner had been either infected or affected by the disease, hence, having knowledge of its signs and symptoms. This example of knowledge questions attests to the fact that knowledge questions test student's ability to remember facts. In this case, this question is a knowledge question because it tests students' ability to remember facts (signs and symptoms) of malaria which they had either felt, observed, heard of or read.

As stated about lower order questions, during interviews, teacher participants also differed in defining higher order questions as presented in table 3.

Table 3: Verbatim quotes on teacher-participants' definitions of higher order questions

<i>Teacher-participant</i>	<i>Definition of higher order question</i>
Teacher 1 School A	<i>High order questions usually invite critical thinking among learners to criticise, to analyse, even to make the argument pertaining to the context.</i>
Teacher 2 School A	<i>It depends on the information that has been presented. Simple questions are those questions which do not require students to think much.</i>
Teacher 1 School B	<i>Higher order questions are questions that demand reasoning.</i>
Teacher 1 School C	<i>Higher order questions are questions which require them to explain or give reason.</i>
Teacher 2 School C	<i>Higher order questions need critical thinking and application of knowledge. There might be a little application of knowledge in lower order questions.</i>

Source: Field data, 2021

From table 3, it is observed that teachers defined higher order questions in English reading comprehension differently. However, despite differences in the definitions of higher order questions, two phrases are common: critical thinking and reasoning. This implies that, teacher participants understood higher order questions in English reading comprehension as those questions which demand students to think critically by employing reasoning. Probably, this is because, responses to higher order questions are not directly accessed from the reading text. but are built on responses to lower order questions. The implication is that, asking questions following Bloom's taxonomy (from

lower order to higher order) has the likelihood of enhancing students' ability to respond to higher order questions appropriately.

4.2.2 Relationships between levels of teacher questions

To understand teachers' understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension, I asked teachers to describe the relationships between lower order questions and higher order questions as presented in table 4.

Table 4: Teachers' descriptions of relationships between the two levels of questions

<i>Teacher participant</i>	<i>Relationship between lower order questions and higher order questions</i>
Teacher 1 School A	<i>Lower order questions set the foundation for higher order questions.</i>
Teacher 2 School A	<i>Answers to lower order questions lead to answers to higher order questions.</i>
Teacher 1 School B	<i>Lower order questions arouse learners interest in the area you are focusing, while higher order questions make learners think deeply on what they are reading because these demand some reasoning. Some questions may be related. You may start with lower order questions to attract learners, and arouse their interest.</i>

Teacher 1 School C	<i>Both lower order questions and higher order questions are asked to check students' understanding of the passage students need to show that they have understood the passage.</i>
Teacher 2 School C	<i>Both help learners develop some skills e.g. sentence construction and writing skill. They enhance thinking capacity of students.</i>

Source: Field data, 2021

Table 4 shows that teachers differed on what they knew about the relationships between lower order teacher questions and higher order teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. It is observed that, two participants (Teacher 1 School A & and Teacher 2 School A) agree that responses to lower level questions help in answering higher order questions, others expressed different relationships between the two levels of teacher questions. The first two teachers (Teacher 1 School A & and Teacher 2 School A) seem to suggest that, for a student to respond to higher order questions, she or he has to know responses to lower order questions. As already pointed out earlier on, responses to lower order questions in English reading comprehension are available in the reading text. As such, answering higher order questions is dependent on mastery of a reading text factual information (Bloom et al, 1956).

From the data in table 4, Teacher 2 School C knew that some questions enhance students' thinking capacity. However, the teacher did not clearly indicate the level(s) of questions which enhances students' thinking capacity. From the same table, it is also evident that the last three teachers had little knowledge about the relationships between the two levels of teacher questions because their descriptions of relationships between the two levels of

teacher questions seem unclear. This indicates that, while some participants know the relationships between lower order and higher order questions, others do not. This was also observed during classroom observations. This implies that question sequencing in lessons conducted by such teachers unlikely follows Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives. Consequently, answering higher order questions may be hard because students lack basic information which is provided by answers to preceding level(s) questions.

What follows in Table 5 is an extract in which students used knowledge of the response to lower questions to find a response to a higher order question:

Table 5: How the teacher used the two levels of questions

Teacher	<i>What is weeping in silence?</i>
Learners	<i>No response</i>
Teacher	<i>What is to weep?</i>
Learner	<i>I think it means to cry</i>
Teacher	<i>So, what is to weep in silence?</i>
Learner	<i>Crying silently.</i>

Source: Field data, 2021

From the extract of classroom observation in table 5, it is observed that learners used the response to the second question for them to answer the first question. After failing to answer the first question, the teacher asked a lower order question. In the process, a learner used the response to that question to get the answer to the first question. Thus, if learners did not know the meaning of the verb “weep”, they would have failed to answer the question “What is weeping in silence?” as well. This implies that, for students to be

able to answer higher order questions, teachers need to ask simple questions first or break the higher order question into lower order questions.

4.2.3 Question sequencing

Despite some participants establishing relationships between lower order questions and higher order questions, I noted that in some lessons, question sequencing was followed, while in others it suffered. Thus, in some lessons, teachers asked questions following levels of educational objectives as stipulated in Bloom's taxonomy, while in others, they did not follow. I considered those who followed question sequencing as having the ability to use questioning techniques to enhance students' understanding of reading texts and vice versa. This implies that, despite teaching the same reading texts, students' understanding of those texts are likely to differ.

Tables 6 and 7 sample two lessons taught by two teachers where questions were asked during the reading time:

Table 6: Questions asked by Teacher 1 School A

Teacher	<i>Search the following words in the passage and read the sentences that contain them: alternative, wearily, on the outskirts, destroy, deserve.</i>
Learners	<i>Scanning the words in the passage</i>
Teacher	<i>Having found these words in the passage, now, let us try to infer meanings of these words according to how they have been used in the passage.</i>
Learner	<i>Inferring meanings of words as used in the passage.</i>

Source: Field data, 2021

Table 7 shows questions asked by Teacher 1 School B in one of his lessons observed.

Table 7: Questions asked by Teacher 1 School B

Teacher	<i>This one is Nene. Do you remember?</i>
Learners	<i>Yes</i>
Teacher	<i>She is a good teacher. 'she' is standing for who?</i>
Learner	<i>She is Nene.</i>
Teacher	<i>What's the profession of Nene here?</i>
Learner	<i>Nene is a teacher.</i>
Teacher	<i>Do you get the point here?</i>
Learner	<i>Yes</i>

Source: Field data, 2021

From tables 6 and 7, it is observed that, in table 6, question sequencing was followed, while in 7 was not. From table 6, the teacher asked questions from lower order to higher order (from scanning to inferring meanings of words). From the same table, it is also observed that learners used the response to the first two questions for them to answer the third one. Thus, I think that, if students could not identify the words in the reading text and read sentences that contained them, it would be likely harder for them to infer their meanings.

From table 7, it is observed that the teacher asked lower order questions only. Thus, recall questions followed each other, and each question was independent of others. This implies that, in such a lesson, students think at lower levels only, thereby being denied opportunities to think at higher level. Thus, I think that, if students are denied opportunities to answer higher order questions which require critical thinking, it means such students are unlikely to develop critical thinking skills, hence, poor performance in English reading comprehension.

During face to face interviews, one teacher participant agreed with the classroom observation quoted in the table 6a above. When asked to mention levels of questions he liked asking, he said, *“I go for both but start with low order questions. Proportion of lower order and higher order depends on the activity being undertaken.* When I asked him to justify his response, he cited Bloom’s taxonomy as a guiding principle in the teaching profession. Teacher 2 School C observed, *“Teaching profession tells us to begin from simple to complex (Field data, 2021).”* Thus, Bloom’s taxonomy stipulates that answers to lower order questions are readily available in the reading text or in students’ minds, while answers to higher order questions are dependent on mastery of answers to lower order questions. This means that, by starting with lower order questions whose answers are available in a reading text, learners use what they already know to answer higher order questions. Therefore, I conclude that answers to lower order questions are the building blocks of responses to higher order questions.

This finding relates to a study done by Hamblen (1984). He studied art criticism questioning strategy within the framework of Bloom’s taxonomy. He found out that,

when questions are properly sequenced, they can foster student involvement in the lesson, and the development of complex levels of thinking.

4.2.4 Importance of ‘during-reading questions’ in English reading comprehension

Another aspect of teachers’ knowledge that the study aimed at establishing was their knowledge of the importance of ‘during-reading questions’ in English reading comprehension. In an English reading comprehension lesson, asking questions can be done at three levels, namely; pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading. As already alluded to earlier on, the study focused on during-reading questions because I understood that such questions would reflect teachers’ knowledge on levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension. In the study, during the reading time, I observed that teachers asked questions after reading small sections of the reading texts. In some lessons, teachers read the comprehension passages, while in others, students read them.

During classroom observation, I noted that asking questions during the reading time helps teachers to monitor whether learning is taking place or not. This means that, I assumed that, if learners were able to answer questions during the reading time, it meant they were comprehending the reading passage. During face to face interviews, one teacher participant from school B attested to this assumption by asserting that: *“Asking questions during reading time helps teachers to monitor progress of the lesson, and to check if learners are comprehending what they are reading [FTFI-Teacher 1 School B-9/6/2021].”*

In this assertion, the teacher participant seems to put students’ understanding of a reading passage at heart. Thus, the major purpose of reading is to comprehend the reading

passage. This indicates that it is possible to analyse a passage read only if the reader is able to extract meaning from it.

The study also found out that ‘during-reading questions’ help students to be attentive in the reading process. This attentiveness allows learners to follow context and contents of the reading passage closely. One verbatim quote of a teacher participant stresses the point as follows: *‘During-reading questions’ may keep students very attentive in the reading process to follow context of the passage [FTFI-Teacher 2 School C-10/6/2021].*”

The quote above points to the fact that asking questions during the reading time may help to keep students attentive as they make themselves ready for any questions which may be asked in the reading process. Therefore, I establish that attentiveness likely helps students follow the reading text, hence, understanding it better.

4.3 Levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons

The second research question investigated the levels of questions that teachers use in English reading comprehension lessons. This section discusses three subthemes, namely; levels of teacher questions according to Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives, textbook questions versus teacher-formulated questions, and levels of during-reading questions as discussed below.

4.3.1 Levels of teacher questions according to Bloom’s taxonomy

The analysis of data from face to face interviews revealed that all five teachers used both lower order type of questions (knowledge and comprehension) and two higher order type of questions, namely; application and analysis. Four of the 5 used asked synthesis type of

questions, and only 1 used questions that fall under the ‘evaluation’ category as indicated in table 8.

Table 8: Number of teacher-participants who asked questions at each level of teacher questions during classroom observation

Category of cognitive levels of teacher questions	Level of educational objectives where a category of levels of teacher questions were asked	Number of teachers who used category of teacher questions
Lower order	Knowledge	All teacher participants
	Comprehension	All teacher participants
Higher order	Application	All teacher participants
	Analysis	Four teacher participants
	Synthesis	All teacher participants
	Evaluation	One teacher participant

Source: Field data, 2021

Table 8 presents categories of levels of teacher questions and levels of educational objectives where a category of levels of teacher questions are asked. From the data presented in the table, it is evident that all the five teachers asked questions at both lower level and higher level educational objectives.

However, it is observed that, while all the five research participants asked questions at knowledge, comprehension, application and synthesis levels, only four asked analysis level questions, and one asked an evaluation level question (refer to table 8). Thus, evaluation level had the least number of teachers who asked questions at that level. This may suggest that, the teachers of English under study rarely ask questions at evaluation level of educational learning objectives.

Since evaluation is the highest level of educational objectives at which questions may be asked, I consider failure to ask questions at that level in English reading comprehension lessons as one factor that is likely to reduce learners' ability to think at the highest level. As such, I feel that development of critical thinking skills is compromised, hence, making it hard for students to answer questions at that level during national examinations.

4.3.2 Teacher-formulated questions versus textbook questions

Further to categorisation according to level of questions asked during the reading time, questions were also categorised into two, namely, textbook questions and teacher-formulated questions. In this study, textbook questions refer to questions which were asked by teachers, but were written in the textbooks containing reading passages. On the other hand, teacher-formulated questions are those questions which teachers formulate and ask during the reading time. I was very much interested in teacher-formulated questions because they were the ones which I believed would reflect teachers' knowledge in teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons. Below are lists of teacher-formulated questions and textbook questions.

4.3.2.1 Teacher-formulated questions

What does the word outskirts of Blantyre mean? Namaseko is worried. What is her biggest worry? What does “awful” mean? She suffered malaria, but she was lucky because she survived. What does that mean? If in a second a child dies, how many children die in a minute? What are headaches and fever in relation to malaria? I understand each one of you has a mosquito net. Do you have mosquito net/ why? Can you mention this girl who Namaeka is talking about? This one is Nene. Do you remember? She is a good teacher. She is standing for who? What’s the profession of Nene here? Do you get the point there? Before the conflict had come to an end, the father has gone to his room. What does this mean? Do you get the point there? Should we say they have agreed in that one point? The father walked away to his room. What does this mean? Okeke is refusing to eat. What does that mean? The father says shall never see her “what does that mean? Of what tribe is Namaeka? Okeke is discussing with other people about his son’s behaviour. Which behaviour is being referred to? His son is referring to whom? So what is the behaviour being talked about Namaeka? Do you know traditional doctors? What character is the father Namaeka, Okeke showing us by refusing to go to a traditional doctor? We also have another character. Can you name the character? Now, the father has written Namaeka. Where is Namaeka? By cutting the wedding picture and sending the picture back to Namaeka. What character is Okeke showing? What does “ear piercing screams” mean? Have you seen

people screaming? Do you know an ear? What does "in a speed of a second" mean? Why do think the wife is not there? What's your opinion? A cousin says they have to call an ambulance. Is that a good idea? Why? Can you give a reason why calling an ambulance at this particular time is important? What does "within no time" mean? What is the profession of Mr Madalitso? Who do you think is Penina? What is a tooth bite? Have you ever seen a person being bitten by a dog? What does "letting the cat out of the bag" mean? What is the name of Penina's husband? What can we pick from the second sentence? From the two sentences, what can we pick in as far as literature is concerned? They are talking about a three storey building. What is other name of a storey building? From this far, what picture do you have for point of view in the story? Do you get the point there? Now, he as pronoun is standing for who? Who has got a large nose here? From what we have read, what character has Aziza shown? Do we know a horse? What picture do we have about the setting of the story? "Sergeant please, let me say few words." Who is speaking? What else can we pick from that sentence? Who is a sergeant? Do we know where the story actually is taking place? Where do you think the woman is? The woman wants to see someone, but she is asking for permission from a policeman. Who is an armed soldier? Do you know where soldiers are trained in Malawi? The sun had passed beyond the central point. What is the central point of the sun? Now we have seen that there is sun on the forehead of the policeman. What character is the woman

displaying? What is the evidence that she is courageous? Now the setting is clear. Where is the woman? Who is the person? What do you think is the objective of the woman going to the prison? What are Aziza and Asha? Who is calling? Who is this Aziza? As she is looking through the window, Aziza sees a face. Whose face is this? In four days I will be transferred. Who is speaking here? To whom is the question passed? We also have an often character there. Who is that character? What character is Aziza showing because she has lifted the baby as asked by the husband? According to the passage, what does the speaker like? Before we go far, where is the speaker? Do we know what Alex is suffering from? Can you nod? He needed to follow what the medics said. What does that mean? According to the passage what does Alex like? What does “perched” mean? What sex is the doctor? What is another word for surgery? Who was silent? It was still hard for me to accept? What does that mean? Who is speaking here? During the surgery, Alex was unconscious. What does that mean? Perhaps things could turn around. What does that mean? She again assures us. To whom is this referring? [Classroom Observation-Teacher 1 School B-9/06/2021; 16/06/2021; 23/06/2021]

Search the following words in the passage and read the sentence which contains the word(s): a) alternative b) wearily c) on the outskirts d) destroy e) deserve. [Classroom Observation-Teacher 1 School A-16/06/2021]

What is Lady Macbeth doing as we first meet here? Who wrote the letter which Lady Macbeth is reading? What are the contents of the letter? Before being given that title of the thane of Cawdor, Macbeth was thane of what? Who was Macbeth's father? Do you remember the prophecies that were given? As the Lady Macbeth finishes reading the letter, how does she react? How does Lady Macbeth feel after reading the letter? Why do you think Macbeth wants Lady Macbeth to keep this information to herself? Why do we tell our friends to keep secret what we tell them? Apart from Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, who else knows what Macbeth is hiding? Why is Lady Macbeth so sure that Macbeth will be king, yet Macbeth himself is unsure because he knows he is far from position of that king. Is it true that Macbeth is so kind? Is it true that Macbeth is weak? Why does Lady Macbeth say that Macbeth is weak? How can you take what does not belong to you? Is it possible? Who is brave between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? If you were Lady Macbeth and have known the prophecy, and the king is coming tonight, what would you do? Do you kill the king at your place? Why Lady Macbeth say the messenger who has brought news that king Duncan is coming brings good news? Why is the news regarded as good news? Duncan is coming here tonight. Is Macbeth willing to take the action? [Classroom Observation-Teacher 2 School A-09/06/2021].

Let's quickly read the passage loudly. [classroom observation- Teacher 1 School C-17/06/2021 & 08/07/2021]

4.3.2.2 Textbook questions

According to the passage, what is the meaning of the following words: a) Culture b) Officiating c) Fabric d) Ethnic? Who can read the words below? a) puffing b) reserve c) ruined d) deteriorates. In groups find the meaning of the words on the chalkboard as used in the passage. [classroom observation- Teacher 1 School C-17/06/2021 & 08/07/2021]

Having found these words in the paragraph, now let us try to infer the meanings of these words according to how they have been used in the passage. [Classroom Observation-Teacher 1 School A-16/06/2021]

From data analysis, four teacher participants (80 percent) asked questions during the reading time, while one (20 percent) did not ask any questions. This may imply that 80 percent of teachers under study knew questioning techniques in reading comprehension lessons. Teacher 1 of School B asked the highest number of questions (78 percent of teacher-formulated questions; and 75.2 percent of all during-reading questions) during the reading time in his five lessons which I observed. Teacher 2 of School C had the lowest number of teacher-formulated questions (0 percent) during the reading time.

Furthermore, the research findings indicate that more teacher-formulated questions than textbook questions were asked during the reading time. Out of the 113 questions asked during the reading time, 109 questions (96.5 percent) were teacher-formulated questions, while only 4 questions (3.5 percent) were taken from textbooks. This may imply that teachers of English prefer asking their own questions to asking textbook questions during the reading time in English reading comprehension lessons.

Furthermore, textbook questions were also used during the reading time. From table 8, it is noted that out of 5 research participants, two (40 percent) asked textbook questions during the reading time. Teacher 1 of School C asked the highest number textbook questions (75 percent of all textbook questions, and 3 percent of all during-reading questions), while Teacher 2 of School A, Teacher 1 of School B and Teacher 2 of School C asked the least number of textbook questions (0 percent of textbook questions) during the reading time. This may signify that teachers of English under this study rarely use textbook questions during the reading time in English reading comprehension lessons, but more frequently use teacher-formulated questions.

4.3.3 Levels of during-reading questions

During the reading time, teachers of English preferred asking some levels of questions for various reasons (refer to table 8). Questions asked during classroom observations were categorised into lower order questions and higher order questions as discussed under the following subheadings:

4.3.3.1 Lower level questions

Findings of the study show that teachers of English ask questions at both knowledge and comprehension levels.

a) Knowledge

During classroom observations, the five teachers were observed asking questions for knowledge. For instance, I considered questions “*State three facts about malaria according to the passage. (Answer: Malaria is spread by mosquitos; malaria kills; and malaria has no vaccine)*” and “*Who are the worst affected by malaria? (Answer:*

Children) [Classroom Observation-Teacher 1 School B-16/06/2021]” as knowledge level because they demanded students to remember textbook information. That is to say, answers to those questions were available in the reading passage such that students were tasked just to remember them.

b) Comprehension

During classroom observations, I noted that, in English reading comprehension, a question may belong to both knowledge and comprehension levels. A question becomes a comprehension question only when a student paraphrases textbook information into her or his answer to that particular question. Thus, a question may belong to both knowledge and comprehension levels of educational objectives depending on how its response is presented. From data of face to face interviews, the following verbatim quote from a teacher participant emphasises this observation:

The way a question is answered can tell whether the question is of lower order or higher order. If students just copy responses from the reading passage, the question becomes of lower order, but if they answer in their own words, it is a higher order question. For instance, the question “Explain what male musicians benefit from the union?” was both lower order and higher order depending on whether students copied from the reading passage or answered it in their own words [FTFI-Teacher 1 School C-10/6/2021].

In the lesson referred to in the quotation, students responded to ‘post-reading questions’ in groups. All the groups were tasked to attempt all the questions and present their

answers to the whole class. In their presentations, some groups copied the response to the sampled question from the reading passage because the correct response was clearly available in the reading passage, while others paraphrased it. The explanation in the verbatim quote seems to suggest that a single question may belong to both levels of teacher questions, namely; lower order and higher order, depending on how the answer is phrased.

This teacher participant identified the question *“Explain what male musicians benefit from the union? (Answer: Men have more access to markets than women.)”* as both higher order and lower order depending on whether students copied from the reading passage or answered in their own words. This means that those groups of students who paraphrased the response to the question made it a comprehension question, but those who copied it from the reading passage made it a knowledge one.

Furthermore, the study also found that other questions directly require students to present their answers in their own words. This may imply that, while some questions may belong to both knowledge and comprehension levels, others explicitly fall under comprehension level of educational objectives. The following question attests to this observation: *“In your own words, explain briefly the movements in starting a car engine (Answer: Shut the doors, adjust a seat, fasten a seat-belt. The starter can be operated, and turn engine on [Classroom Observation-Teacher 2 School A-16/06/2021].”* This question suggests that copying from the reading passage renders the answer incorrect. As a result, it is asked explicitly at comprehension level of educational objectives. Therefore, it can be concluded that comprehension level questions require students to paraphrase textbook information for them to come up with the answer.

4.3.3.2 Higher order questions

The findings of the study reveal that teachers of English ask questions at application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation levels of educational learning objectives as discussed under the subheadings below.

a) Application level questions

The study found that teachers of English ask questions at application level of educational objectives. For instance, the following questions from teacher 2 school A “*Why is it important to make sure no one smokes at the scene of accident? (Answer: The car can catch fire) Is there an incident where you know someone smoked? (No answer) What happened? (No response)*” [Classroom Observation-Teacher 2 School A-16/06/2021] demanded learners to apply what they had read in the text to a concrete situation. To answer such questions, students had to transfer the textbook information into their own experiences.

Using responses to knowledge level questions and comprehension level questions, students answer application level questions. For example, in the question for teacher 1 school B “*If in 30 seconds a child dies from malaria, how many children die in a minute? (Answer: Two children.*” students had to use their knowledge about numerals, arithmetic and time for them to find the number of children dying every minute. In this lesson, the teacher participant taught a reading passage *Malaria No More* in which the writer highlighted that, in every second, a child dies of malaria.

b) Analysis level questions

In the study, most English reading comprehension passages were short stories. Out of 13 English reading comprehension lessons, 8 were on short stories (*Kalikanga and kalikako; Peer pressure; The Rainmaker; A flicker of hope; The conversation from the third floor; Weeping in silence; Marriage: a private Affair; Malaria no more*), 2 were on plays (*Justice; Macbeth*), and 3 were on descriptive texts (*Women in Music; Malawi customs; Starting a car engine*). During the classroom observations, in short stories and plays, students were asked questions pertaining to literary terms such as character and characterisation. In his book *The familiar stranger: English literature anthology for junior secondary school in Malawi*, Chamasowa (2013) calls literary terms in short story “elements of a short story.” Furthermore, he lists five elements of a short story, namely, character, setting, plot, conflict and theme. Therefore, I considered questions which were asked to describe a story using the elements analysis level. Questions that follow were considered as analysis level questions in a lesson on the short story *The conversation from the 3rd floor* because they were asked on elements of literature.

From the two sentences, what can we pick in as far as literature is concerned? From what we have read, what character has Aziza shown? Do we know where the story actually is taking place? [Classroom Observation-Teacher 1 School B-23/06/2021]

In the questions above, question 1 targeted all the elements of literature, while questions 2 was on character and characterisation. Question 3 was on the setting of the story.

In syllabus for English forms 3 and 4, literature is situated under the core element of critical analysis. This implies that, in character analysis, readers use critical thinking skills. Therefore, I considered questions which dealt with literary devices to be at analysis level.

c) Synthesis level questions

The study found out that teachers of English ask questions at synthesis level of educational objectives in English reading comprehension. During classroom observation, it was evident that out of the five teachers, four asked synthesis level questions in some lessons. Furthermore, it was observed that, in six out of thirteen English reading comprehension lessons observed, the four participants asked their learners to predict contents of the reading texts. Questions were considered as synthesis level questions because, for learners to find answers to those questions, they needed to put together what they could see in the picture and their own experiences. I considered the following questions as synthesis level questions:

Why is Lady Macbeth so sure that Macbeth will be king, yet Macbeth himself is unsure because he knows he is far from position of that king? (Answer: Because two of the prophecies had been fulfilled); Why do you think Macbeth wants Lady Macbeth to keep this information to herself? (Answer: Macbeth is not from the family of King Duncan). Is it true that Macbeth is so kind? (Answer: No), Who is brave between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth? (Macbeth) [Classroom Observation-Teacher 2 School A-09/06/2021]

In the above questions, students were supposed to summarise the behaviour of the characters in order to come up with responses. It must be highlighted that questions asked at synthesis level comprised 4 percent. This may suggest that, teachers under the study rarely ask synthesis level questions in English reading comprehension lessons. The implication is that, students' opportunities to think at synthesis level of educational objectives is likely reduced. Consequently, students' ability to answer questions at this level may also be reduced.

d) Evaluation level questions

In this study, analysis of data from classroom observations showed that teachers of English rarely ask evaluation level questions in English reading comprehension lessons. During classroom observations, it was observed that only one teacher asked a question at this level in only one of his lessons. Thus, during classroom observations, only one question was asked at evaluation level of educational objectives. Therefore, it can be concluded that, teacher participants rarely or hardly ask evaluation level questions in English reading comprehension lessons. As alluded to earlier on, this implies that, failure to ask questions at that level is likely to reduce learners' ability to think at the highest level. As such, I feel that development of critical thinking skills is compromised, hence, making it hard for students to answer questions at that level during national examinations.

In that lesson, teacher participant 1 from school C asked students, *“What lesson have you learnt from the passage about women in music participating in Malawi?”* The question was asked at an evaluation level of educational learning objectives because, for learners to come up with answers, they had to give judgement on the reading text. Thus, learners

were given the chance to evaluate contents of the reading passage and give their judgement, hence, thinking critically (Muayanah, 2014). For students to come up with responses to such a question, they needed to know answers asked at all the first five levels of educational objectives, and give their judgment. Additionally, judgement needs to be backed by factual information from either the reading text or learners' experiences. Therefore, coming up with a judgement requires critical thinking.

4.3.4 Why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension lessons

The third specific research question investigated reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate over others. This section discusses the reasons and their categories. After categorising the questions into levels of the reading comprehension lesson under which they were asked, I aimed at finding out reasons as to why some levels of teacher questions dominate. It must be highlighted here that this categorisation was made on questions asked during the reading time because I wanted to find out teachers' knowledge about questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons. That was the case because all pre-reading questions and post-reading questions (except one post-reading question) were taken from textbooks. Under this theme, I discuss three subthemes, namely; lower order questions versus higher order questions, categories of reasons for dominance of one level over others: deliberate choice and inadequate knowledge on questioning techniques as presented below. During face to face interviews, teachers expressed different reasons as presented in table 9.

Table 9: Reasons for preferring levels of teacher questions

Teacher	Question level	Reason for preferring that level of questions
Teacher 1 School A	Lower order	<i>They are simple to ask and learners can respond massively during the delivery of the lessons. In higher questions very few students participate to answer such questions during comprehension. So they are evenly asked</i>
Teacher 2 School A	Higher order	<i>They provoke student's critical thinking.</i>
Teacher 1 School B	Higher order	<i>They make learners think more. I want learners to be thinking deeply</i>
Teacher 1 School C	Lower order and higher order	<i>Lower level questions are for low level students, while higher level questions are for higher level students, hence, the need to ask both so that every student is assisted</i>
Teacher 2 School C	Lower order and higher order	<i>Teaching profession tells us to begin from simple to difficult ones (simple to complex).</i>

Source: Field data, 2021

From table 9, it is observed that one teacher preferred asking lower order questions to asking higher order questions; another teacher preferred asking higher order questions to

asking lower order questions; while two teachers preferred asking both. It is also noted that the teacher-participants had different reasons for their preferences. In this study, I categorised the reasons for preferring levels of teacher questions as discussed in the subtheme below.

4.3.5 Categories of reasons for dominance of one level over the other

The study categorised reasons for dominance of one level of teacher questions over another into two, namely; deliberate choice and lack of knowledge in questioning techniques as discussed under the following subheadings:

4.3.5.1 Deliberate choice

In the study, deliberate choice refers to an act of choosing something from a group of what is available while aware of its pros and cons. From face to face analysed interview data, I found out that, sometimes, teachers are at liberty to choose which level of questions to ask their students in English reading comprehension lessons owing to some reasons. This means that teachers who know the levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension may deliberately choose which level(s) of teacher questions they may ask.

The study findings indicate that teachers of English have different reasons for their deliberate preference of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. During the face to face interviews, the five teacher-participants gave different reasons for their preferences. Giving reasons why they preferred one level of teacher questions signify that some teachers deliberately choose levels of questions they want to ask students in their lessons.

a) Reasons for preferring asking lower order questions

Research findings suggest that some teachers deliberately prefer asking lower order questions for four reasons. Firstly, they are easier to formulate than higher orders questions. During face to face interviews, I found out that teachers prefer generating lower order questions to generating higher level questions because lower level questions are easier and less time-consuming to formulate and to score than higher level questions.

They are simple to ask and learners can respond massively during the delivery of the lessons. In higher order questions, very few students participate to answer such questions during comprehension. So they are evenly asked [FTFI-Teacher 1 School A-16/062021 (refer to table 9).

This points to the fact that, when formulating lower order questions, teachers know their answers already, hence, easy scoring. Therefore, deliberate preference of asking lower order questions because of their easiness may be attributed to individual teachers' laziness to formulate and score higher order questions. Thus, such teachers avoid struggling in formulating and scoring higher order questions because of their level of difficulty. This implies that learners' ability to think at higher level is compromised because of teachers who prefer asking lower order questions to higher order questions because their difficulty in formulating and scoring.

Second reason is massive answering of lower order questions by students. During face to face interviews, one teacher participant argued that, during lesson delivery, learners are able to respond to lower order questions massively as compared to how they may respond to higher order questions where very few learners respond to them. This seems to imply

that some teachers of English deliberately choose to ask more lower order questions than higher order questions because questions asked at this level are easy to answer, hence, maximising students' participation. Probably, this is because answering lower order questions requires just remembering factual information previously learnt (Bloom et al, 1956). Thus, learners' responses to lower order questions are produced with little effort as compared to responses to higher order questions.

Thirdly, some teachers prefer asking lower order questions to asking higher order questions because lower order questions attract attention of most learners. As a result, teachers ask questions which they think may attract their learners to answer them. Justifying his preference of lower level questions, one teacher agrees that “*Lower order questions attract learners, and arouse their interest [FTFI-Teacher 1 School B-10/6/2021]*” (refer to table 9). In this direct quote, the teacher participant puts learners' attention and interests during learning at the centre. This suggests that learning hardly takes place in the absence of learners' attention and interest, hence, their need. If learners divert their attention from the reading text, and lose interest in the lesson, the lesson's learning objectives are more unlikely to be achieved.

The above findings relate to Broek, et al., (2001)'s study in which they observed that, questions asked during the reading time motivate readers to put more effort into understanding the text as a whole. In the study, Broek, et al., (2001) investigated the effects of inferential questioning, and of the timing of such questioning, on narrative comprehension by 4th-, 7th-, and 10th-grade students and college students. Questioning facilitated college students' memory but only for information specifically targeted by the questions and only when questioning occurred during the reading time.

Lastly, dominance of lower order questions may be due to teachers' assumptions that their learners are slow learners. Thus, when a teacher feels her or his students are slow learners, she or he is more likely to prefer asking lower order questions to asking higher order ones.

In the current study, the predominant use of lower order questions in English reading comprehension lessons may deny learners opportunities to answer higher order questions, hence, reducing their chances of developing critical thinking skills. Additionally, learners who are able to answer higher order questions in such lessons are not considered as important. During interviews, one teacher participant from school B conceded, "*Lower level questions are for low level students.*" (refer to table 9). This means those teachers who prefer asking lower order questions to higher order questions consider slow learners. This has a possibility of such teachers ignoring to test higher level educational objectives, thereby failing to prepare learners for public examinations which cover all levels of educational objectives which English syllabi stipulate.

b) Reasons for preferring asking higher order questions

Within the data analysed, findings reflected participants providing reasons for asking higher order questions. During face to face interviews, teachers indicated one reason, in general, as to why some teachers prefer asking higher order questions to asking lower order questions. In justifying their preference over higher order questions in English reading comprehension, two teacher participants indicated: "*They make learners think more. I want learners to be thinking deeply [FTFI-Teacher 1 School B-10/06/2021]. They provoke student's critical thinking [FTFI-Teacher 2 School A-09/06/2021]*" (refer to

table 9). The teachers' responses suggest that asking higher order questions in English reading comprehension lessons encourages learners to think critically. Thus, I established that finding answers to higher order questions requires critical thinking.

This finding relates to Cerd, et al., (2009) study which found out that, while understanding concepts and propositions in English reading comprehension lessons is paramount, teachers prefer asking questions that require learners to think broadly, hence, the dominance of higher order questions in the lessons. I think thinking broadly has a likelihood of improving student's academic success because learners' academic success in reading comprehension is dependent on predominant use of higher order questions during classroom interaction (Redfield & Rousseau, 1981).

4.3.5.2 Inadequate knowledge on questioning techniques

According to the findings of this study, lack of knowledge in questioning techniques by teachers of English is another reason why some levels of teacher questions dominate over others. The study found out that, teachers of English do not prepare 'during-reading questions' in advance. As a result, depending on their level of understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons, they may ask lower order questions only or higher order questions only or both or none. This is in contrast to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives which stipulates that teachers have to ask questions at all levels of the taxonomy if teacher questioning is to enhance learning.

The study considered asking questions during the reading time as a measure of teachers' knowledge on questioning techniques because most 'pre-reading questions' and 'post-reading questions' were from textbooks. Therefore, failing to ask questions during the

reading time is considered as a sign of having inadequate knowledge in questioning techniques in teachers. During face to face interviews, in justifying his failure to ask questions during the reading time, a teacher who did not ask any questions during the reading time told me that he wanted his students to read the passage before answering comprehension questions.

The research participant's response seemed to contradict what he had done in his lesson. During his lesson, it was observed that all 'pre-reading questions', and all 'post-reading questions' except one which he asked in his English reading comprehension lesson observed were from the textbook. This seems to mean that the teacher did not manipulate the textbook questions because he lacked knowledge on questioning techniques. Darn, Trainer and Çetin (2019) contend that some teachers lack knowledge in questioning because they are given little training in asking questions. Probably, this is why the teacher preferred using silent reading in teaching English reading comprehension. Thus, I assumed that lack of knowledge on teacher questioning techniques made him unable to formulate questions that could be asked during the reading time.

4.4 Chapter summary

The chapter has discussed teachers' understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension; levels of teacher questions used in English reading comprehension lessons; and reasons why some levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension dominate over others. The findings have shown that teacher-participants of English partially knew levels of teacher questions. While all of them were able to categorise questions into lower order and higher order, they were unaware of levels of educational objectives. The findings also show that teachers asked questions at

five levels of educational objectives namely; knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. However, the findings show that research participants rarely asked questions at evaluation level of educational objectives.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents conclusions and implications on how teachers of English use questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools. In this chapter, conclusions are drawn based on the discussions of the findings of the study as discussed in chapter 4. The conclusions are discussed according to the main themes that were used in discussing the findings of each research question in chapter 4. The implications of the study findings are discussed along each conclusion made.

5.2 Teachers' understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension

The first research question was aimed to find out teachers' understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension. The findings revealed that teachers of English have knowledge concerning lower and higher levels of teacher questions, but are unable to categorise them into six levels of educational objectives.

Therefore, I conclude that teachers had little knowledge on levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension because none of them categorised lower order and higher order questions into the six levels of educational objectives. This implies that teachers of English are unlikely to use questioning to enhance development of students' critical thinking because their question sequencing fails to follow levels of educational objectives.

From the findings of the study, I concluded that, in general, teachers defined questions which students found easy to answer as lower order, while those which required critical thinking and reasoning were considered higher order. Defining the two levels of teacher questions differently has the implication that question sequencing was more likely to be compromised thereby failing to follow Bloom's taxonomy (from lower order to higher order).

From the findings, I established that, while some teachers knew relationships between lower order and higher questions, others did not. The implication is that, teachers who lacked knowledge on the relationships between the two levels of teacher questions were unlikely to use questioning to enhance learning because their question sequencing were more unlikely to follow Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.

From the findings, I established that asking questions during the reading time helps teachers to assess students and attract students' attention. The implication is that, if teachers ask questions during the reading time, students' understanding of the reading texts may be enhanced.

5.3. Levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons

The second specific research question was intended to investigate levels of teacher questions used in English reading comprehension lessons. From the findings of the study, I concluded that in English reading comprehension lessons, testing the highest level of educational objectives (evaluation) is almost neglected because only 0.9 percent of during-reading questions asked during classroom observations tested evaluation level. The implication is that, since higher order questions enhance students' critical thinking, neglecting testing the highest level of educational objectives may result in reduction in development of students' critical thinking.

Additionally, from the findings of the study, I concluded that, during the reading time of an English reading comprehension lesson, teachers ask more teacher-formulated questions than textbook questions because questions arise as the reading progresses. The implication is that, since questioning is done intuitively, teachers' knowledge on teacher questioning techniques in theory, and the ability to ask and sequence questions following Bloom's taxonomy in practice affect learners' understanding of reading texts.

5.4 Why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension lessons

The third specific research question sought reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension lessons. From the study findings, I established that teachers of English may prefer asking lower order questions to asking higher order questions and vice versa depending on different reasons like teachers' inadequate lesson preparation; and inadequate knowledge on levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension. This implies that lesson preparation is likely to suffer

and the use of different levels of teacher questions to enhance students' critical thinking will not be realised in so doing denying the students' opportunities to comprehend the reading texts.

In the current study, I argue for during-reading teacher questions that are sequenced according Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives to enhance students' critical thinking skills development and increased students' opportunities to understand written texts better.

5.5 Recommendations

In the study, I recommend that teacher educators give student-teachers of English ample opportunities to practise questioning techniques in English reading comprehension during their studies, and conduct refresher courses on questioning techniques for serving secondary school teachers of English, to equip them with enough knowledge in theory and enough experience in practice, on levels of teacher reading comprehension questions. This will improve teachers' use of questioning techniques in English reading comprehension thereby increasing opportunities for development of students' critical thinking.

I also recommend that teachers of English ask questions at all levels (including the highest level) of educational objectives in English reading comprehension lessons in a sequence that students understand the reading texts better. This is more likely to enhance development of students' critical thinking thereby increasing their understanding of the reading texts.

I also recommend that inspectors for secondary schools include teacher questioning techniques on their inspection tools. This is more likely to encourage teachers to use questions for learning.

5.6 Suggested areas for further study

I identified one area for further research. I suggest a study to be conducted on how teachers of English handle students' responses to questions in English reading comprehension lessons to enhance development of students' critical thinking.

5.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented conclusions and implications of the study, my argument, recommendations and an area for further study. The conclusions and implications discussed in this chapter have been established based on the findings discussed in chapter 4 of the thesis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letter of introduction from University of Malawi



Chancellor College

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES

To: Whom it may concern
From: PG office, Curriculum and Teaching Studies department
Date: 9th December, 2020

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FOR CHRISPAL CHITSUMBA

The bearer of this letter, Chrispal Chitsumba (MED-LED-04-19), is a postgraduate student in the School of Education at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. He is pursuing a master of education Language degree in Curriculum and Teaching Studies.

Chrispal Chitsumba is currently conducting his fieldwork, collecting data for his study. Any assistance rendered to him will be greatly appreciated.

Should you require additional information concerning this letter, please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Maseko".

Bob Maseko, PhD
PG COORDINATOR
CURRICULUM AND TEACHING STUDIES DEPARTMENT

Email: bmaseko@cc.ac.mw



Appendix 2: Introductory letter from CEED Manager

Tel (265) 01253611/612 - 01253612

Fax(265)01253227

All correspondence to be addressed to
The Education Division Manager



CENTRAL EAST EDUCATION
DIVISION, PRIVATE BAG 233,
KASUNGU

Our Ref No __CEED/12/65

Date: 4th JUNE, 2021

TO : THE HEADTEACHERS,
CENTRAL EAST EDUCATION DIVISION,
P/BAG 233,
KASUNGU.

INTRODUCTORY LETTER – CHRISPAL CHITSUMBA (EMP# 048813)

The bearer of this letter is Chrispal Chitsumba, a teacher at Chamama Community Day Secondary School.

He is currently studying towards Masters of Education in curriculum and teaching studies(Language Education) with Chancellor college, University of Malawi and is now on research stage.

We would therefore like to request your office to assist him accordingly with the required information pertaining to the course he is studying.

Yours faithfully,

HOSEA KHOMBEDZA

For: EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER (CEED)



Appendix 3: Application letter for research sites

Chamama Community Day Secondary School,
Post Office Box 10,
Mtunthama

12 May, 2021.

The Education Division Manager,
Central East Education Division,
Private Bag 233,
Kasungu.

Dear Sir,



REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT MY RESEARCH IN CEED

I write to request for permission from your office to allow me to conduct my research in three secondary schools in your division, namely; Ergo Community Day Secondary School, Chimbowe Community Day Secondary School and Mtuntham All Saints Community Day Secondary School. I am a Masters of Education in Curriculum and Teaching Studies (Language Education) student at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. Currently, I am preparing for data collection, and I have sampled CEED as my research site, hence, seeking for permission to carry out research activities in the division.

Attached is a letter of introduction from Chancellor College Post-Graduate Coordinator.

Your consideration is highly appreciated.

Yours In-Service

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chrispal B.D.F. Chitsumba", is written over a horizontal line.

Chrispal B.D.F. Chitsumba

Appendix 4: Interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

School code: _____ **Teacher code:** _____

1. a) Do you ask questions when teaching English reading comprehension? Explain why?

- b) How many levels of teacher questions do you know? Name them.

- c) Explain how you understand levels of teacher questions you have mentioned.

- d) What are the differences among levels of teacher questions you have mentioned?

- e) Do you ask simple questions or difficult questions? Explain why you ask such questions.

f) From the questions you asked during the lesson, which questions do you think were simple and which ones were difficult for learners? Explain your answer.

g) What is the relationship between simple questions and difficult questions in English reading comprehension lessons?

h) In an English reading comprehension lesson, questions may be asked at three levels namely; pre-reading, during reading and post-reading. At what level of an English reading comprehension lesson do you ask questions? Give a reason for your answer.

i) What is the importance of during-reading questions in an English reading comprehension lesson?

2. Which level(s) of teacher questions do you prefer asking in English reading comprehension lessons?

3. Why do you prefer asking the level(s) of teacher questions you have mentioned in 2 above to asking the other?

COVID-19 PREVENTION MEASURES

During interviews, I intend to follow COVID-19 prevention measuring by adhering to Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 guidelines as follows:

- i. ensuring that teachers, learners and I myself wash hands with soap regularly
- ii. ensuring that there is a one metre social distance among learners both inside and outside the classroom
- iii. ensuring that teachers and I use hand sanitisers after touching any surface
- iv. ensuring that teachers, learners and I myself wear face mask

Appendix 5: Classroom observation schedule

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

School: _____ **Class:** _____

Teacher code: _____ **Reading passage:** _____

a) Levels of teacher questions asked according to Bloom's taxonomy

<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Comprehension</i>	<i>Application</i>	<i>Analysis</i>	<i>Synthesis</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
list	Compare	Act	analyse	arrange	Appraise
name	describe	apply	appraise	combine	argue
recall	discuss	complete	categorise	compose	assess
record	explain	construct	compare	construct	attach
relate	express	demonstrate	contrast	create	choose
repeat	report	dramatize	debate	design	compare
state	identify	employ	differentiate	devise	contrast

tell	reorganise	illustrate	distinguish	formulate	conclude
underline	restate	imitate	examine	manage	estimate
arrange	tell	include	question	organise	evaluate
define	translate	participate	breakdown	plan	interpret
label	classify	interpret	categorise	prepare	explain
match	defend	practise	criticise	propose	support
order	indicate	use	point out	develop	value
outline	express	change	distinguish	generate	judge
select	exemplify	choose		rearrange	justify
read	paraphrase	interpret		synthesise	measure
recite	predict	practise		reconstruct	rate
record	rewrite	prepare		summarise	revise
sequence	summarise	produce			score
	translate	show			select
	infer	use			support
		write			value

Anderson, L.W. & Krathwohl, D.R. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing (abridged edition)*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

b) Dominating level(s) of reading comprehension questions asked during classroom observation

COVID-19 PREVENTION MEASURES

During interviews, I intend to follow COVID-19 prevention measuring by adhering to Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 guidelines as follows:

- i. ensuring that teachers, learners and I myself wash hands with soap regularly
- ii. ensuring that there is a one metre social distance among learners both inside and outside the classroom
- iii. ensuring that teachers and I use hand sanitisers after touching any surface
- iv. ensuring that teachers, learners and I myself wear face mask

Appendix 6: A publishable article

**INVESTIGATING TEACHER QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES IN ENGLISH
READING COMPREHENSION LESSONS IN MALAWI PUBLIC SECONDARY
SCHOOLS**

Authors: Chrispal Chitumba & Amos Chauma: University of Malawi, P.O. Box 280,
Zomba

Abstract

Questioning is one of the techniques of teaching English reading comprehension. Teachers' quality of questioning impacts on students' existing thinking and reasoning skills. This study investigated how teacher questioning is used to enhance students' critical thinking skills in English reading comprehension in selected Malawian secondary schools. Using a case study research design, data were collected using classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed thematically using Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. The findings of the study revealed that some reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate in English reading comprehension are the following: inadequate lesson preparation; lack of knowledge in questioning techniques; testing evaluation level of educational objectives is almost neglected. The implications of these findings are that teachers of English are unlikely to use questioning to enhance development of students' critical thinking because their question sequencing fails to follow levels of educational objectives. Neglecting testing evaluation level may result in reduction in development of students' critical thinking, and

lesson preparation is likely to suffer and the use of different levels of teacher questions to enhance students' critical thinking will not be realised.

Key words: English reading comprehension, teacher questioning, Bloom's taxonomy, levels of educational objectives, critical thinking, lower order higher order questions

Introduction

In Malawi public secondary schools, reading is one of the core elements in the English language curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science & Technology, 2013). Principally, the teaching of reading aims to enable learners have the ability to understand and interpret content of written texts as efficiently as possible (Akkaya & Demirel, 2012; Muayanah, 2014).

Questioning is one of the English reading comprehension tasks which teachers use questions to assess learning as well as to promote reading comprehension (Broek, Tzeng, Ridsen, Trabasso, & Trabasche, 2001). This implies that tasks which students complete with a reading passage affect their understanding of a reading text (Cunningham & Moore, 1993). Additionally, task completion helps teachers to measure learners' understanding of a reading text because comprehension of a text is not directly observable (Brown, 2000).

To emphasise the need for questioning in Malawi public secondary schools, the syllabus for English forms 1 and 2 and syllabus for English forms 3 and 4 attest to the fact that question-and-answer is one of the teaching, learning and assessment methods in English reading comprehension (MoEST, 2013).

The teaching of English reading comprehension is important for the learners to understand content of subjects whose medium of instruction is English, and even more importantly, to understand examination questions in those subjects. It is known that high rate failure during MSCE examinations are based on candidates' failure to understand examination reading texts or examination questions presented in English. Therefore, use of teacher questions in the teaching of English reading comprehension provides students with good practice of the national examination questions (MANEB, 2018; Hayikaleng, Nair & Krishnasamy, 2016).

However, it appears that, although teacher questioning is the most frequently used teaching strategy in teaching English, secondary school students' overall performance in MSCE English examinations in reading comprehension remains poor (Kubota, 2011). It is from this background and the general practice in the English reading comprehension classroom that we were prompted to investigate teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers of English use questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in Malawi public secondary schools.

Significance of the study

This study is significant because its findings would add knowledge to the academia on teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons in secondary schools. The knowledge is important because English reading comprehension skills

enable individuals to understand contents of various examinable written texts in all subjects whose medium of instruction is English by enhancing their critical thinking skills. Therefore, appropriate use of questioning in English reading comprehension is more likely to give candidates opportunities to practise examinations' techniques in the national examinations. Additionally, findings of the study would inform curriculum developers as well as the ministry of education on how to improve the teaching of English reading comprehension in secondary schools. Lastly, the knowledge would also help teacher educators to modify their teacher training programmes in questioning techniques.

Literature review

The literature review explored reasons why some levels of questions dominate in English reading comprehension.

Scholars give different reasons as to why some levels of teacher questions dominate. For example, in a study conducted in Shiraz-Iran, Khorsand (2009) argues that lower level questions dominate because they are less time-consuming to generate, and easy to score than higher level questions. Khorsand (2009) observes that creating test items using Bloom's taxonomy requires time and effort, hence, time-consuming. As a result, teachers prefer generating lower level questions to generating higher level questions because lower level questions are easier and less time-consuming to formulate and to score than higher level questions. Mtunda and Safuli (1997) agrees with Khorsand by contending that formulating higher order questions is difficult. As a result, most questions which teachers ask tend to be of lower level.

Secondly, Khorsand (2009) also identifies teachers' lack of knowledge on levels of teacher questions as another reason for the dominance of questions of one level in sets of questions. He observes that some teachers are mostly unaware of different cognitive levels of questions and learning. As such, they may focus on one level and ignore others unintentionally. Teachers' lack of knowledge on levels of teacher questions may be attributed to inadequate teacher training in questioning. In a study done Malaysia, Sardareh and Saad (2013) found out that, although the participating teachers were degree holders, most of the questions they asked were of lower level. Sardareh and Saad (2013) did not find out why degree holders referred asking lower order questions to asking higher order ones.

Materials and Methods

In this study, we used case study research design. A case study research design focused on 5 teachers of English in Kasungu, Central East Education Division (CEED), in Malawi. This research design was chosen because we sought to deeply understand the teacher questioning techniques in English reading comprehension in the selected secondary schools (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Razavieh, 2010). Three secondary schools were sampled. Teachers of English, especially those teaching English in forms one and three classes and their students, purposively selected, in the sampled secondary schools were studied in their natural settings.

This study used mixed research methods. Qualitatively, we used case study research design, qualitative data collection tools (classroom observation schedule and semi-structured interview guide), and qualitative data generation methods (classroom

observation and face to face interviews) (Fatch, 2002). Quantitatively, in the presentation and discussion of results, we used numerical data in identifying dominating levels of teacher questions (Creswell, 2009).

Population and sampling

The research was done in three secondary schools in Kasungu, Malawi. Two classes, Form One and Form Three, were studied. The decision to select secondary schools in Kasungu was arrived at because they were within reach of our work station, hence, cost effective (Walker, 2005).

Purposively, five teachers of English, particularly those who were teaching in Form One and Form Three classes, and their learners of English were selected as research participants. Form One and Form Three classes were chosen because we assumed that, although learners would be disturbed by the study in one way or another, they were not writing national examinations in the year of carrying out the study; and that the sample would be sufficient to provide maximum insight and understanding of how teachers of English use questioning techniques in English reading comprehension in Malawi public secondary schools.

Data generation methods

In the study, data were generated using two data generation methods, namely; classroom observation and face to face interviews as discussed in the sections that follow

Classroom observation

First, data were generated through classroom observation. This data generation method was chosen because it allows researchers to generate data from primary sources in their natural settings (Bell, 2005). Specifically, classroom observation was used to ascertain dominant levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. During classroom observations, data were recorded by video-recording and completing a classroom observation schedule, (Punch, 2009).

In the classroom observation schedule, a checklist, we recorded levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons (Bell, 2005). The checklist was used to check dominant levels of questions in the English reading comprehension lessons. To achieve this, we listed some common action verbs that indicate levels of questioning in Bloom's taxonomy. Bloom's taxonomy creates measurable verbs to help describe and classify observable knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours and abilities (Bloom et al., 1956). This method of data recording was chosen because we believed that it might minimise or eliminate variations that may have arisen from data based on individual perceptions of events and situations (Bell, 2005).

During classroom observation, video-recording was used to record English reading comprehension lessons because we believed that it would help us to review the lessons observed whenever verification of some information during data analysis and interpretation was needed. We also believed that video-recording would help him capture information which might be missed when taking down field notes.

Face-to-face interviews

Face to face interview involved semi-structured open-ended questions. Five teachers of English who were teaching in Form One and Form Three during the study to understand their knowledge about teacher levels of teacher questioning in English reading comprehension lessons in more depth (Creswell, 2009). Each teacher participant was interviewed once after his first observed lesson. Data generated through interviews were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim later because we believed that audio recording was less distracting than taking down notes (Creswell, 2009).

Face to face interviews allowed us to modify the questions during the interview process (Creswell, 2009). These interviews also helped us to verify classroom observations (Punch, 2009; Bell, 2005). Lastly, they were used because they allowed us to make immediate follow-up and clarification of participants' responses by asking them some probing questions (Punch, 2009; Bell, 2005).

Trustworthiness and credibility of the study

In this study, credibility issues were dealt with through triangulation, piloting and research participants' verbatim quotes (Anney, 2014; Creswell, 2009; Punch, 2009). In qualitative research, trustworthiness of the research findings is ensured by credibility of the study (Creswell, 2009). Credibility indicates that a particular research approach is consistent across different researchers and different studies (Punch, 2009).

Triangulation

Triangulation is a combination of two or more research methodologies to study the same phenomenon (Bell, 2005; Thurmond, 2001). In this case, research methodologies refer to data sources, data generation methods and theoretical perspectives (Creswell, 2009; Punch, 2009; Bell, 2005). In the current study, data sources were different teachers of English and their learners from different secondary schools; while data generation methods were classroom observation and face to face interviews. The study also varied data recording tools. It used video-recording, audio-recording and completion of a classroom observation schedule. Video-recording and completion of an observation schedule were used to record data generated during classroom observations, while audio-recording was used to record data generated through interviews.

Triangulation was used under the assumption that the weaknesses inherent in one approach could be counterbalanced through strengths in another (Jack & Raturi, 2006).

Piloting

In the study, two data generation tools, namely; classroom observation schedule and interview guide, and one data recording tool were pretested and refined.

Research participants' verbatim quotes

Data generated through interviews were transcribed verbatim to mitigate bias because changing words or phrases might change the sense of meaning of what the research participant would have said (Ary, et al., 2010).

Ethical consideration

In this study, conformity to research ethics was ensured by doing four things. Firstly, research participants (teachers) were informed about the aim, procedure and duration of the research and the importance of their participation (Creswell, 2009). Secondly, the participants were assured that the information they provided would be used solely for the study, and that they should participate in the study voluntarily. Creswell (2009) and Punch (2009) contend that participants must voluntarily agree to participate in the research and must know what their participation entails.

Thirdly, we concealed participants' identities by using letters of the alphabet (A, B and C) for names of selected secondary schools, and by using code 1 for teachers who were teaching English in Form One, and code 2 for those who were teaching English in Form Three. Creswell (2009) and Punch, (2009) agree that researchers need to protect their subjects if they are to collect rich data. Lastly, we sought clearance from University of Malawi administration, CEED Manager's office, the school administrators of the sampled secondary schools, and the sampled teachers of English. Clearance from University of Malawi administration and CEED Manager's office were in writing, secondary school administrators and teacher participants gave their consents verbally.

Limitations to the study

The study met one limitation. During the third week of classroom observation, all the three research sites were affected by COVID-19 pandemic. Resultantly, the affected teachers and students went in self-quarantine for fourteen days. Therefore, the study data collection halted for two weeks, and resumed later in a revision week.

Results

The specific research question investigated reasons why some levels of teacher questions dominate over others. After categorising the questions into levels of the reading comprehension lesson under which they were asked, we aimed at finding out reasons as to why some levels of teacher questions dominate. It must be highlighted here that this categorisation was made on questions asked during the reading time because we wanted to find out teachers' knowledge about questioning techniques in English reading comprehension lessons. That was the case because all pre-reading questions and post-reading questions (except one post-reading question) were taken from textbooks.

Table 1 summarises how each teacher-participant fared in the two levels of teacher questions (lower order and higher order questions) during the lesson observations during the reading time.

Table 1: How each teacher-participant fared in the two levels of teacher questions

Teacher	Lower level	Higher level	Total
Teacher 1 School A	1	1	2
Teacher 2 School A	10	12	22
Teacher 1 School B	40	45	85
Teacher 1 School C	2	2	4
Teacher 2 School C	0	0	0
TOTAL	53	60	113

Source: Field data, 2021

Table 1 shows that, in general, some teachers (Teacher 2 School A and Teacher 1 School B) asked more higher order questions than lower order in their lessons, while others (Teacher 1 School A, Teacher 1 School C, and Teacher 2 School C) balanced the two levels. However, it must be made clear that, in some lessons, teachers asked more lower order questions than higher order questions. Furthermore, teachers under study, in general, asked more higher order questions than lower order questions during the reading time. As shown in the table 1, the number of higher order questions was slightly higher than the number of lower order questions. Thus, out of 113 questions asked during the reading time, 60 questions (53 percent) were of higher order, while 53 questions (47 percent) were of lower order. This can be concluded that teachers under this study preferred asking higher order questions to asking lower order questions.

During face to face interviews, teachers expressed different reasons as presented in table 2 below

Table 2: Reasons for preferring levels of teacher questions

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Question level</i>	<i>Reason for preferring that level of questions</i>
Teacher 1 School A	Lower order	<i>They are simple to ask and learners can respond massively during the delivery of the lessons. In higher questions very few students participate to answer such questions during comprehension. So they are evenly asked</i>

Teacher 2 School A	Higher order	<i>They provoke student's critical thinking.</i>
Teacher 1 School B	Higher order	<i>They make learners think more. I want learners to be thinking deeply.</i>
Teacher 1 School C	Lower order and higher order	<i>Lower level questions are for low level students, while higher level questions are for higher level students, hence, the need to ask both so that every student is assisted.</i>
Teacher 2 School C	Lower order & higher order	<i>Teaching profession tells us to begin from simple to difficult ones (simple to complex).</i>

Source: Field data, 2021

From table 2, it is observed that one teacher preferred asking lower order questions to asking higher order questions; another teacher preferred asking higher order questions to asking lower order questions; while two teachers preferred asking both.

Discussions / Analysis

The study categorised reasons for dominance of one level of teacher questions over another into two, namely; deliberate choice and lack of knowledge in questioning techniques as discussed under the following subheadings:

Deliberate choice

In the study, deliberate choice refers to an act of choosing something from a group of what is available while aware of its pros and cons. From face to face analysed interview data, we found out that, sometimes, teachers are at liberty to choose which level of questions to ask their students in an English reading comprehension lesson basing on different reasons. This means that teachers who know the levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension may deliberately choose which level(s) of teacher questions they may ask.

The study findings indicate that teachers of English have different reasons for their deliberate preference of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons. From table 2, it is evident that the five teacher-participants gave different reasons for their preferences. Giving reasons why they preferred one level of teacher questions signify that some teachers deliberately choose levels of questions they want to ask students in their lessons.

Reasons for preferring asking lower order questions

Research findings suggest that some teachers deliberately prefer asking lower order questions for four reasons. Firstly, they are easier to formulate than higher orders questions. During face to face interviews, we found out that teachers prefer generating lower order questions to generating higher level questions because lower level questions are easier and less time-consuming to formulate and to score than higher level questions. This points to the fact that, when formulating lower order questions, teachers know their answers already, hence, easy scoring. Therefore, deliberate preference of asking lower

order questions because of their easiness may be attributed to individual teachers' laziness to formulate and score higher order questions.

Second reason is massive answering of lower order questions by students. During face to face interviews, one teacher participant argued that, during lesson delivery, learners are able to respond to lower order questions massively as compared to how they may respond to higher order questions where very few learners respond to them. This seems to imply that some teachers of English deliberately choose to ask more lower order questions than higher order questions because questions asked at this level are easy to answer, hence, maximising students' participation. Probably, this is because answering lower order questions requires just remembering factual information previously learnt (Bloom et al, 1956). Thus, learners' responses to lower order questions are produced with little effort as compared to responses to higher order questions.

Thirdly, some teachers prefer asking lower order questions to asking higher order questions because lower order questions attract attention of most learners. As a result, teachers ask questions which they think may attract their learners to answer them. Justifying his preference of lower level questions, one teacher agrees that "*Lower order questions attract learners, and arouse their interest [FTFI-Teacher 1 School B-10/6/2021].*" In this direct quote, the teacher participant puts learners' attention and interests during learning at the centre. This suggests that learning hardly takes place in the absence of learners' attention and interest, hence, their need. If learners divert their attention from the reading text, and lose interest in the lesson, the lesson's learning objectives are more unlikely to be achieved.

Lastly, dominance of lower order questions may be due to teachers' assumptions that their learners are slow learners. Thus, when a teacher feels her or his students are slow learners, she or he is more likely to prefer asking lower order questions to asking higher order ones.

In the current study, we found that the predominant use of lower order questions in English reading comprehension lessons does not consider learners who are able to answer higher order questions in such lessons as important. During interviews, one teacher participant from school B conceded, "*Lower level questions are for low level students.*" This means those teachers who prefer asking lower order questions considered slow learners only. This has a possibility of such teachers ignoring to test higher level educational objectives, thereby failing to prepare learners for public examinations which cover all levels of educational objectives which English syllabi stipulate.

Reasons for preferring asking higher order questions

Within the data analysed, findings reflected participants providing reasons for asking higher order questions. During face to face interviews, teachers indicated one reason, in general, as to why some teachers prefer asking higher order questions to asking lower order questions. The study established that asking higher order questions in English reading comprehension lessons encourages learners to think critically. Thus, finding answers to higher order questions requires critical thinking. This means that, while understanding concepts and propositions in English reading comprehension lessons is paramount, teachers prefer asking questions that require learners to think broadly (Cerd, Vidal-Abarca, Martí'nez, Gilabert & Gil, 2009), hence, the dominance of higher order

questions in the lessons. This has a likelihood of improving student's academic success because learners' academic success in reading comprehension is dependent on the use of higher order questions during classroom interaction (Redfield & Rousseau, 1981).

Inadequate knowledge on questioning techniques

According to the findings of this study, lack of knowledge in questioning techniques by teachers of English is another reason why some levels of teacher questions dominate over others. The study found out that, teachers of English do not prepare 'during-reading questions' in advance. As a result, depending on their level of understanding of levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension lessons, they may ask lower order questions only or higher order questions only or both or none.

We considered asking questions during the reading time as a measure of teachers' knowledge on questioning techniques because most 'pre-reading questions' and 'post-reading questions' were from textbooks. Therefore, we considered failing to ask questions during the reading time as a sign of having inadequate knowledge in questioning techniques in teachers. During face to face interviews, in justifying his failure to ask during- reading questions. A teacher who did not ask any during-reading questions argued that he wanted his students to read the passage before answering comprehension questions.

The research participant's response seemed to contradict what he had done in his lesson. During his lesson, it was observed that all 'pre-reading questions', and all 'post-reading questions' except one which he asked in his English reading comprehension lesson were from the textbook. This seems to mean that the teacher did not manipulate the textbook

questions because he lacked knowledge on questioning techniques. Darn, Trainer and Çetin (2019) contend that some teachers lack knowledge in questioning because they are given little training in asking questions. Probably, this is why the teacher preferred using silent reading in teaching English reading comprehension. Thus, we assumed that lack of knowledge on teacher questioning techniques made him unable to formulate questions which could be asked during the reading time.

Conclusion

From the study findings, we established that teachers of English may prefer asking lower order questions to asking higher order questions and vice versa depending on different reasons like teachers' inadequate lesson preparation; and inadequate knowledge on levels of teacher questions in English reading comprehension. This implies that lesson preparation is likely to suffer and the use of different levels of teacher questions to enhance students' critical thinking will not be realised in so doing denying the students' opportunities to comprehend the reading texts. Thus, students' performance in higher order questions in national examinations will likely remain unsatisfactory.

Recommendations

We recommend giving student-teachers of English ample time to practise questioning techniques in English reading comprehension during their studies, and conducting refresher courses on questioning techniques for serving secondary school teachers of English in order to equip teachers of English with enough knowledge in theory and enough experience in practice, on levels of teacher reading comprehension questions. This will likely improve teachers' use of questioning techniques in English reading

comprehension thereby increasing opportunities for development of students' critical thinking.

Area for further study

We identified one area for further research. We suggest a study to be conducted on how teachers of English handle students' responses to questions in an English reading comprehension lesson to enhance development of students' critical thinking.