



Questioning and reason-giving in EFL spoken interaction as expressions of critical-thinking orientations

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Critical thinking in EFL speaking can be expressed through questioning and reason-giving during classroom interaction. However, how these speech acts function and can be interpreted as critical-thinking orientations across different communicative contexts remains underexplored. This qualitative case study examined the illocutionary functions of questioning and reason-giving, how they could be interpreted through Facione's critical-thinking framework, and how communicative demands shaped their emergence in transactional and interpersonal speaking activities. The participants were 46 undergraduate EFL learners. Classroom interactions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Searle's Speech Act Theory and Facione's framework, with MAXQDA 2024 supporting the coding and analysis. Of the 230 segments analyzed, 103 involved questioning and 127 involved reason-giving. Information Seeking was the most frequent questioning function (87 occurrences), while Causal Explanation (55 occurrences) and Justification (40 occurrences) were prominent reason-giving functions. In the code co-occurrence analysis, Analysis showed the most intersections, followed by Explanation and Evaluation, whereas Self-Regulation had the fewest. Role-play primarily involved information seeking to address information gaps, while discussion featured defense of argument as learners responded to contrasting viewpoints. Problem-solving prominently involved causal explanation and justification as learners examined problems and considered solutions. These patterns suggest that different communicative demands provided distinct opportunities for learners to express critical-thinking orientations through questioning and reason-giving.

Keywords: questioning; reason-giving; illocutionary functions; critical-thinking orientations; EFL spoken interaction

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INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking requires learners not only to communicate ideas but also to interpret information, respond to others, consider different viewpoints, and support their contributions with relevant reasons. This broader communicative expectation has become increasingly important as English language learning is expected to support communication, collaboration, and higher-order thinking rather than linguistic accuracy (Arfae, 2019; Salimi & Safarzadeh, 2019).

From this perspective, critical thinking represents an important dimension of language learning, especially in speaking activities that require learners to interpret information, consider alternative perspectives, and provide relevant reasons to support their views (Acar & Arslan, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025).

In spoken interaction, critical thinking can be reflected in learners' efforts to clarify information, examine ideas, and explain their responses. For instance, [Senowarsito et al. \(2024\)](#) illustrate how aspects of learners' thinking may become visible through their engagement in language-learning tasks. Thus, classroom interaction provides a meaningful context for examining how learners express reasoning through their use of language.

[Facione \(1990\)](#) defines critical thinking as comprising six interrelated skills: Interpretation, Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Explanation, and Self-Regulation.

In EFL speaking interactions, orientations toward these skills can be observed when learners seek clarification, explore relationships between ideas, evaluate different perspectives, draw conclusions, or provide explanations for their responses. Higher-order questioning may further encourage learners to engage critically with information during language-learning activities ([Akatsuka, 2019](#)). However, spoken discourse does not provide direct access to learners' internal cognitive processes. In this study, critical thinking orientations refer to orientations expressed in learners' spoken contributions rather than to their overall critical thinking ability. Thus, the analysis focuses on aspects of critical thinking that become verbally observable through classroom interaction.

A pragmatic perspective can help clarify what learners accomplish through their spoken contributions. Speech Act Theory considers utterances as actions performed with specific communicative purposes ([Austin, 1962](#); [Searle, 1979](#)). In classroom interaction, learners may use language to seek information, request clarification, explain the causes of a situation, justify a decision, or defend a particular viewpoint. Previous studies of EFL classroom discourse have demonstrated that speech acts can perform in different functions depending on speakers' intentions and the contexts in which they are produced ([Darong, 2024](#); [Hidayat et al., 2022](#)). Pragmatic competence is also important, as learners need to understand meaning in context and respond appropriately to their interlocutors during interaction ([Wang et al., 2024](#)). From this perspective, questioning and reason-giving provide useful ways to examine these processes. Questions may be used to obtain necessary information, clarify previous contributions, or introduce a new focus, while reasons reveal the basis for learners' explanations, evaluations, and positions to other participants. Speech Act Theory and Facione's framework offer complementary perspective on the same spoken contribution. Speech Act Theory identifies the communicative function of an utterance, besides Facione's framework helps interpret the critical thinking orientation expressed through it.

The relationship between questioning, reason-giving, and critical-thinking orientations varies according to their pragmatic and interactional context. A question may function to obtain information, seek clarification, or introduce a new topic, whereas reason-giving may be used to explain a causal relationship, justify a judgment, or support a particular position. The orientation conveyed through an utterance depends on the learner's actual contribution, the pragmatic function it serves, and its role within the surrounding interaction. Previous studies have found that EFL learners

employ critical-thinking skills during speaking activities [Maulana & Putra \(2022\)](#), while pragmatic strategies in oral interaction can provide opportunities for learners to critically examine and respond to ideas ([Andania et al., 2024](#)). [Saleh \(2019\)](#) further identifies a relationship between speech-act functions and higher-order thinking. Although these studies establish an important connection between language use and reasoning, they provide limited insight into how learner-produced questioning and reason-giving perform different illocutionary functions and how these speech acts can be interpreted as different critical-thinking orientations in naturally occurring classroom interaction.

The activity in which an utterance occurs may also shape the communicative demands placed on learners. During role-play, for instance, learners may need to obtain missing information or make practical decisions in order to maintain the interaction. In discussion activities, they may be expected to consider and respond to contrasting viewpoints, while problem-solving tasks may require them to clarify an issue, examine its causes and consequences, and evaluate possible solutions. Research on transactional speaking has identified role-play, dialogue, and information-focused activities as contexts that promote purposeful language use ([Horváthová & Beňušková, 2025](#); [Wardah & Rosnija, 2023](#)). Similarly, structured debate can provide learners with opportunities to examine issues and support their positions with reasons ([Hadi et al., 2021](#)). Although these studies highlight the value of interactive speaking activities, less attention has been given to how differences in communicative demands across activities shape learners' use of questioning and reason-giving as classroom interaction unfolds.

Previous studies have addressed important aspects of speech acts, critical thinking, and speaking activities, yet these areas have largely been examined separately. Research on speech acts has primarily focused on pragmatic categories and communicative functions, whereas studies of critical thinking have more often focused on cognitive skills or learning outcomes. Speaking activities, meanwhile, has generally emphasized learner participation, task implementation, or speaking development. Consequently, limited understanding remains of how the communicative demands of different speaking activities are related to the emergence of particular questioning and reason-giving functions and critical thinking orientations expressed throughout them.

This study addresses this gap by integrating these three analytical dimensions together in the analysis of classroom interaction. Rather than determining a critical-thinking orientation solely on the basis of the linguistic form of a question or reason-giving utterance, the analysis considers the content of the utterance, its pragmatic function, and its position within the surrounding interaction. Such a context-sensitive approach enables the study to relate what learners accomplish through their utterances with the reasoning they express and the interactional conditions in which these speech acts occur. Accordingly, this study aims to identify the illocutionary functions of questioning and reason-giving, examine how these speech act can be interpreted as orientations toward critical thinking based on Facione's framework, and explain why different interactional contexts

in a Transactional and Interpersonal Speaking class facilitate their emergence.

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the illocutionary functions of the questioning and reason-giving speech acts used by EFL learners in transactional and interpersonal speaking classes?
2. How are these speech act interpreted as orientations toward critical thinking based on Facione's framework?
3. Why do the interactional contexts of transactional and interpersonal speaking classes facilitate the emergence of questioning and reason-giving speech acts oriented toward critical thinking?

METHODS

Research Design and Participants

This study employed qualitative case study design to examine questioning and reason-giving in naturally occurring EFL classroom interactions. The research was conducted in one Transactional and Interpersonal Speaking class at Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The class was purposively selected because its speaking activities included role-play, discussion, and problem-solving, which provided naturally occurring interactional context for examining questioning and reason-giving speech acts in response to different communicative demands. All 46 undergraduate EFL learners enrolled in the class participated in the observed sessions. The analysis focused specifically on utterances that functioned as questioning or reason-giving speech acts, with the number of such utterances varying across individual learners.

Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observation using audio and video recordings, together with field notes. The observations took place over four weeks, with one 100-minute classroom sessions observed each week. Role-play was conducted across two sessions, with one common task performed by 17 pairs, each performance lasting approximately five minutes. Discussion and problem-solving were each conducted in one session, and involved 11 and 10 group performances on different topics, respectively. Each discussion lasted six to seven minutes, while problem-solving activity lasted seven to eight minutes. The activities differed in duration, topics, and participation structure, but they were all conducted within the same course and regular instructional setting. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the observations and recordings was obtained from the relevant academic authority and the course instructor. The learners were informed about the purpose of the study and gave informed consent for their classroom interactions to be recorded and used for research purposes. To ensure confidentiality, identifying information was removed from the transcripts. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and then imported into MAXQDA 2024 for systematic coding and data organization.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a theory-informed thematic approach adapted from [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) six-phase process, which involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns, reviewing emerging patterns, defining analytical categories, and reporting the findings. First, questioning and reason-giving were analyzed based on their illocutionary functions using Speech Act Theory ([Searle, 1979](#)). The same utterances were then interpreted using [Facione \(1990\)](#) framework of six critical-thinking orientations: Interpretation, Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Explanation, and Self-Regulation. Critical thinking codes were assigned only the content, pragmatic function, and interactional position of an utterance provided sufficient evidence for the interpretation.

All coding was conducted by the researcher, with no second coder involved in the analysis. Coding consistency was addressed through repeated review of the coded segments using Retrieved Segments function in MAXQDA 2024. Each segment was reconsidered in relation to the operational definitions provided in the codebook and its surrounding interactional context. Ambiguous cases were re-examined before the final coding decision was made by researcher. Code co-occurrence analysis was used to examine relationships between illocutionary functions and critical thinking orientations. The distribution of these codes across role-play, discussion, and problem-solving activities was also examined in relation to the communicative demands of each activity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that questioning and reason-giving performed different pragmatic functions depending on what learners needed to accomplish in an exchange, were interpreted as expressing several orientations toward critical thinking, and were examined in relation to one another by considering illocutionary functions, critical-thinking orientations, and interactional contexts. Representative excerpts are provided to illustrate the main patterns without presenting the complete set of coded data.

Illocutionary Functions of Questioning and Reason-Giving

To address the first research question, 230 questioning and reason-giving segments were identified and classified according to their illocutionary functions based on Searle's speech act theory. [Figure 1](#) presents the frequency and percentage of each identified function, thus illustrating the learners' dominant communicative aims during classroom interaction.

When the six functions were grouped into the two broader speech act categories, questioning accounted for 103 segments, while reason-giving accounted for 127 segments. Information Seeking was the most frequently occurring function, accounting for 38% of the data (87 segments), followed by Causal Explanation at 24% (55 coded occurrences), Justification at 17% (40 coded occurrences), and Defense of Argument at 14% (32 coded occurrences). Clarification Request accounted for 6% (13 coded

occurrences), while Topic Initiation was the least frequent function, occurring in only 1% (3 coded occurrences). This distribution suggests that learners used questions more frequently when they needed information, alternative perspectives, or possible responses than when they sought to clarify a previous contribution or introduce a new conversational focus.

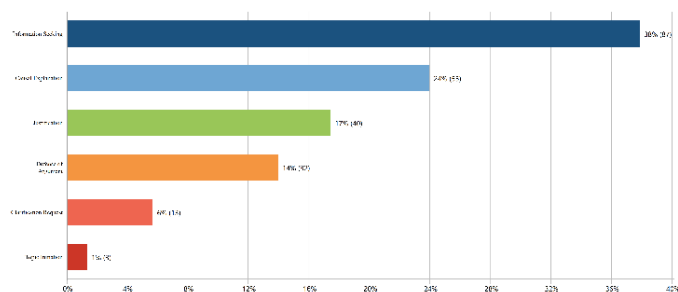


FIGURE 1 | Distribution of Illocutionary Functions of Questioning and Reason-Giving

A representative instance of Information Seeking occurred in a library role-play:

Excerpt 1 (Task: Role Play/RP)

"I am trying to find a book about world history, but I can't locate it in the, on the shelf. So, would you mind checking the library catalog for me?" (RP 16, Pos. 17)

Before asking the question, the learner explains that they are requesting information from the interlocutor. Rather than directly requesting information, the learner provides contextual information to justify the request, making the interaction more coherent and contextually appropriate.

The expression *"would you mind checking the library catalog for me?"* the request without changing its primary communicative purpose. The learner is not merely asking the interlocutor to perform an action but seeking information that will help locate the book and complete the role-play task. The requested action therefore functions as the means through which the missing information can be obtained.

From Searle's Framework, this questioning act carries a directive illocutionary force because it invites the interlocutor to provide a verbal response. More specifically, it functions as information seeking because the response is expected to supply information needed to address the immediate communicative problem.

Reason-giving demonstrated a different pattern. Causal Explanation, the second most frequent function overall, occurred when learners described why a condition occurred or how one condition could result in a particular consequence. This pattern can be observed in the following contribution from the problem-solving activity:

Excerpt 2 (Task: Problem Solving/PS)

"Because of poor time management, many students sleep late to finish assignment. This can affect their health and concentration in class." (PS 9, Pos. 2)

This learner's utterance in the problem-solving task presents poor time management as the starting point of several related problems. The phrase *"because of poor time management"* indicates the initial cause, which leads the

learners to stay awake late to complete their assignment. The following utterance extends this causal sequence by showing its possible effects on students' health and concentration in class. Instead of merely identifying poor time management as a problem, the learner shows how it can lead to further difficulties in learners' lives.

Consequently, the segment functions as a reason-giving speech act of causal explanation. By describing the effect of poor time management, the learner provides a clearer basis for the group to consider possible solutions. The utterance also carries an assertive illocutionary function because the learner presents the relationship between poor time management, sleep restriction, and reduced concentration as a description of the situation.

Justification and Defense of Argument also involved reason-giving, but their interactional purposes were different. Justification provided a basis for an initial choice, judgment, or proposed action, whereas Defense of Argument became relevant when learners needed to consider or respond to another interpretation, viewpoint, or possible solution. Thus, supporting an initial position and defending it in relation to an alternative were treated as distinct communicative actions.

The two less frequent questioning functions also served distinct roles. Clarification Request referred back to information that had already been introduced into the interaction but remained incomplete or unclear. For instance, *"Okay, so what's the purpose? What's the purpose?"* (DISC 3, Pos. 2) requested further elaboration on an aspect that had already been mentioned rather than seeking entirely new information. In contrast, Topic Initiation introduced a new conversational focus, as illustrated by *"How can I help you today?"* at the beginning of a role-play. Its low frequency suggests that learners generally developed topics already established by the speaking activities instead of independently introducing new ones.

Taken together, questioning was expressed through Information Seeking, Clarification Request, and Topic Initiation, whereas reason-giving was represented by Causal Explanation, Justification, and Defense of Argument. Within Searle's broader classification, questioning generally carried directive force because learners sought verbal responses from their interlocutors, while reason-giving generally functioned as assertive acts because learners presented explanations, reasons, and claims. However, the specific illocutionary value of these utterances depended on the communicative purpose they served within the ongoing interaction.

Critical-Thinking Orientations Expressed through Questioning and Reason-Giving

The second analysis examined how these illocutionary functions intersected with the six critical-thinking orientations: Interpretation, Analysis, Evaluation, Inference, Explanation, and Self-Regulation. Code co-occurrence analysis produced 183 intersections. The 230 and 183 totals refer to different analytical units: 230 represents the questioning and reason-giving segments classified by illocutionary function, while 183 represents code-pair intersections between illocutionary function codes and critical orientation codes. Therefore, two figures represent different types of analytical counts. A segment could have no

intersection, or several intersections depending on the critical-thinking orientations expressed in the interaction.

The MAXQDA co-occurrence map provides an overall visual representation of the relationships among these categories.

TABLE 1 | Co-occurrence of Illocutionary Functions and Critical-Thinking Orientations

Code System	Interpretation	Analysis	Evaluation	Inference	Explanation	Self-Regulation	SUM
Questioning > Topic Initiation	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Questioning > Information Seeking	15	32	5	0	2	1	55
Questioning > Clarification Request	2	6	3	0	1	0	12
Reason-Giving > Defense of Argument	1	4	11	6	6	0	28
Reason-Giving > Causal Explanation	1	21	3	5	21	0	51
Reason-Giving > Justification	3	2	11	6	9	5	36
SUM	22	66	33	17	39	6	183

The Code Relations Browser MAXQDA 2024 (table 1) showed that Analysis had the highest number of coded intersections (66), followed by Explanation (39), Evaluation (33), Interpretation (22), Inference (17), and Self-Regulation (6). These figures represent intersections between pragmatic and critical-thinking codes rather than independent frequency totals for the six orientations. Information Seeking showed the strongest intersection with Analysis (32), while Causal Explanation intersected with both Analysis and Explanation 21 times. Defense of Argument had its strongest relationship with Evaluation, with 11 intersections.

More importantly, these relationships were not one-to-one. A question was not classified as Analysis simply because it took an interrogative form, nor was a reason automatically categorized as Explanation. The orientation was determined by what the utterance expressed, the communicative function it served, and its position within the interaction. This principle is particularly evident in a discussion concerning social media and concentration.

Excerpt 3 (Task Type: Discussion/DISC)

Speaker 1: "Why do you think social media makes it hard for students to focus?" (DISC 8, Pos. 2)

Speaker 3: "Honestly, I think it's because we keep checking our phones. Every notification makes us want to look at our phone, and that pulls our attention away." (DISC 8, Pos. 2)

Speaker 1: "So when students keep getting distracted, what happens during lectures?" (DISC 8, Pos. 2)

Speaker 3: "Well, because of that, students lose focus really fast. They might listen at first, but after a few minutes, their attention is gone and they miss important explanations." (DISC 8, Pos. 2)

The sequence progresses from identifying a cause to explaining its consequences. The first question asks why social media interferes with concentration rather than simply asking whether it does. The response connects notifications and repeated phone checking with distraction. The follow-up question then shifts from the source of the distraction to

its consequences during lectures, while the response relates distraction to reduced attention and missed explanations.

Analysis becomes evident in the relationships established among notifications, repeated phone checking, distraction, reduced attention, and missed information. Explanation is reflected in the way these relationships are made understandable to the other participants. The question initiates an analytical direction, but the reasoning becomes more explicit when the response provides the causal relationship. This helps explain why Information Seeking frequently intersected with Analysis and why Causal Explanation was associated with both Analysis and Explanation.

Evaluation was particularly evident when learners assessed the appropriateness of a linguistic choice or a position based on identifiable considerations rather than simply expressing a preference.

Excerpt 4 (Task Type: Discussion/DISC)

"Yeah, in Indonesian journalism, this is often done for credibility. Active voice like 'Someone contaminated the meals' can create unnecessary controversy. Passive voice makes the news look neutral and professional." (DISC 4, Pos. 2)

In this excerpt, the learner focuses on the presentation of information that occurs the way a news report is received. The statement "Someone contaminated the meals" is seen as causing "unnecessary controversy" because it appears to identify someone as responsible. A more neutral way of presenting the information is preferred because it sounds more professional. Rather than choosing one form another, the learner supports the preference by considering its possible effect on the tone of the report and the audience's response. This reason-giving utterance reflects the evaluation, as the learner applies communicative criteria to determine that form is more appropriate for journalistic reporting.

Interpretation and Inference appeared under more specific interactional circumstances. Interpretation became evident when learners clarified ambiguous information, reformulated previous contributions, or made an existing understanding

explicit for confirmation. For example, in the role-play question “*Our topic is healthy food, right?*” (RP 5, Pos. 2), the learner checks an existing understanding rather than seeking entirely new information. The orientation lies in making that interpretation available for confirmation or correction.

Inference occurred when learners drew on previously discussed information to reach a broader conclusion or anticipate a likely consequence. The statement “*All right, overall, social media distracts students, messes up their time management, and lowers their motivation, which affects their academic focus*” (DISC 8, Pos. 2) brings together several previously discussed effects and develops them into a broader conclusion concerning academic focus.

Self-Regulation occurred least frequently and generally appeared in basic task-related forms. For instance, “*Thanks! I just wanna make sure it looks good before we submit*” (RP 5, Pos. 2) shows that the learner does not assume the task is already satisfactory but recognizes the need to check the result before submission. Such instances reflect monitoring of an outcome rather than an extended process of reconsidering or revising one’s reasoning.

Interactional Contexts and Communicative Demands

The third analysis examined why role-play, discussion, and problem-solving were related to emergence of questioning and reason-giving and critical-thinking orientations expressed through them. The MAXQDA Code Matrix Browser indicated that the distribution of speech-act and critical-thinking codes differed across the three activities.

TABLE 2 | Distribution of Speech Acts and Critical-Thinking Orientations across Speaking Activities

CATEGORIES	TASK TYPE > ROLE PLAY	TASK TYPE > DISCUSSION	TASK TYPE > PROBLEM SOLVING	TOTAL
Speech Acts > Questioning > Topic Initiation	1	2	0	3
Speech Acts > Questioning > Information Seeking	52	24	11	87
Speech Acts > Questioning > Clarification Request	2	7	4	13
Speech Acts > Reason-Giving > Defense of Argument	0	32	0	32
Speech Acts > Reason-Giving > Causal Explanation	7	18	30	55
Speech Acts > Reason-Giving > Justification	17	3	20	40
Critical Thinking > Interpretation	18	4	1	23
Critical Thinking > Analysis	10	29	29	68
Critical Thinking > Evaluation	10	27	10	47
Critical Thinking > Inference	1	10	13	24
Critical Thinking > Explanation	34	20	19	73
Critical Thinking > Self-Regulation	3	2	6	11
TOTAL	155	178	143	476

The Code Matrix Browser contained 476 coded occurrences across the speech act and critical-thinking categories. These [table 2](#) represent coded occurrences rather than 476 unique utterances. Discussion accounted for 178 occurrences, followed by role-play with 155 and problem-solving with 143. These [table 2](#) represent coded occurrences rather than 476 unique utterances. A single interactional segment could receive both a speech-act code and a critical-thinking code. It’s because the three activities differed in the number of sessions, duration, topics, and participation structure. Their overall totals were not treated as directly comparable. The analysis instead focused on the codes that were particularly prominent within each activity and how these patterns related to its communicative demands.

Information Seeking was particularly prominent in role-play, with 52 occurrences. Discussion contained all 32 occurrences of Defense of Argument and showed relatively high frequencies of Analysis (29) and Evaluation (27). Problem-solving included 30 occurrences of Causal Explanation and 20 of Justification, along with a strong presence of Analysis (29), Explanation (19), and Inference (13). These distributions indicate that the three activities provided different interactional conditions for questioning, reason-giving, and the expression of critical-thinking orientations.

TABLE 3 | Summary of Communicative Demands, Prominent Speech Acts, and Critical-Thinking Orientations across Speaking Activities

Speaking Activity	Main Communicative Demand	Prominent Speech Acts	Prominent Critical-Thinking Orientations
Role-Play	Resolving information gaps and making practical decisions	Information Seeking; Justification	Explanation; Interpretation
Discussion	Examining and responding to contrasting viewpoints	Defense of Argument; Information Seeking; Causal Explanation	Analysis; Evaluation; Explanation
Problem-Solving	Clarifying problems and developing supported solutions	Causal Explanation; Justification	Analysis; Explanation; Inference

Role-Play as a Context for Resolving Information Gaps

Role-play placed learners in situations where the roles, settings, and communicative goals were already established, but some information remained unavailable or certain decisions still needed to be made. Learners therefore needed to identify what information was missing and seek it from their interlocutors or negotiate a decision to complete the exchange. This communicative demand helps explain the prominence of Information Seeking in role-play.

The following interaction illustrates a situation in which the learners needed to reach a shared practical decision.

Excerpt 5 (Task Type: Role Play/RP)

Speaker 1: *"That sounds good. What color should I use for the background?"* (RP 5, Pos. 2)

Speaker 2: *"Maybe green, it looks fresh and fits the theme."* (RP 5, Pos. 2)

The question does not seek a fixed factual answer. Instead, it presents a design choice for negotiation by inviting the other learner to suggest an appropriate option. The response goes beyond simply naming green by explaining why the choice is suitable: it *"looks fresh and fits the theme."* The learner therefore connects the proposed colour with the theme of the project. Questioning emerges because a practical decision has not yet been resolved, while reason-giving becomes relevant because the proposed option needs to be justified to the other participant. Analysis becomes evident in the connection between the visual choice and its suitability for the theme. This interaction therefore demonstrates how the communicative demands of collaborative decision-making can create opportunities for both questioning and reason-giving to emerge.

A similar process occurred when information, rather than a choice, was unavailable. In the library role-play, locating the book depended on information that had not yet been obtained, prompting the learner to ask the interlocutor to check the catalogue. Although the situations were different, both required learners to identify what was needed and involve the interlocutor in reaching an appropriate response.

Discussion as a Context for Examining and Defending Viewpoints

Discussion involved a different communicative demand because learners needed to engage with ideas introduced by other participants. These contributions could be extended, compared, questioned, or challenged. As a result, simple agreement or disagreement was convincing. Learners needed to explain how they understood an issue and provide reasons for accepting, modifying, or rejecting a particular position.

Excerpt 6 (Task Type: Discussion/DISC)

Speaker 1: *"And [Speaker 2], what do you think about the broader effects of social media?"* (DISC 7, Pos. 3)

Speaker 2: *"Its use has both positive and negative impacts on students. The positive impacts include expanding social networks and increasing learning motivation, while the negative impacts can reduce study time and focus."* (DISC 7, Pos. 3)

Speaker 1: *"What do you think, [Speaker 3]?"*

(DISC 7, Pos. 3)

Speaker 3: *"I can understand that, it's a good perspective, [Speaker 2]. I want to add a little about a balanced perspective regarding the controlled use of social media. A balanced approach to social media use is essential for maintaining academic focus. When students set clear time limits and use social media mainly for academic purposes, the negative effects can be reduced. Therefore, responsible and goal-oriented social media use leads to better time management and sustained concentration. In this way, social media becomes a supportive tool rather than a distraction."* (DISC 7, Pos. 3)

The questions brought different viewpoints into the interaction. Speaker 2 addressed both positive and negative consequences of social media use, while Speaker 3 developed this perspective by identifying the conditions under which its use may remain beneficial. The recommendation to establish clear time limits and prioritize academic purposes resulted from considering both the benefits and drawbacks rather than expressing an unsupported preference. The activity therefore created a communicative demand for learners to engage with contrasting perspectives. Questioning introduced or expanded the viewpoints available for consideration, while reason-giving allowed learners to explain the basis of their judgments. Analysis can be observed in the comparison of the two sides of the issue, Evaluation in judging controlled use as more appropriate, and Self-Regulation orientation is also suggested in the recommendation to manage the time and purpose of social media use.

The same interactional pattern appeared in the discussion about distraction, where one learner connected notifications and repeated phone checking with reduced concentration, while another question extended the issue to its consequences during lectures. Each contribution provided a basis for the next turn, enabling learners to develop the issue through a sequence of questions and explanations rather than through isolated opinions.

Problem-Solving as a Context for Developing Solutions and Supporting Decisions

Problem-solving focused on an unresolved issue that required a practical response. Learners needed to identify the problem, examine its causes and consequences, consider possible solutions, and explain why a particular response might be effective. This communicative demand helps explain the prominence of Causal Explanation, Justification, and Analysis in problem-solving activities.

Excerpt 7 (Task Type: Problem Solving/PS)

Speaker 1: *"Especially Trans. Trans. What what do you think about?"* (PS 6, Pos. 2)

Speaker 2: *"Oh, the Trans itu ih is very kotor. Kotor apa? Dirty dirty. Dirty, and smell not good."* (PS 6, Pos. 2)

Speaker 3: *"Yes, smell good ini, ini, ini, eh... Yes, smell not good."* (PS 6, Pos. 2)

Speaker 2: *"Yes, not good sometimes ada people smoking in in trans. So banyak eh more people feel badly and and uncomfortable."* (PS 6, Pos. 2)

Speaker 1: *"So what we what we what we must do for improve the public transportation?"* (PS 6, Pos. 2)

Speaker 2: *"I think the government it should be perhatian, ya. Lebih about the public's transportation because um when the government is beri dana lebih atau melihat kelapangan terkait public transportation, maybe it would be better public transportation will be clean, more improve, and people can feel comfortable, and when we when semua orang..."* (PS 6, Pos. 2)

The interaction initially identifies several conditions observed in public transportation, including dirt, unpleasant smells, smoking, and passenger discomfort. By relating these conditions with passengers' experiences, the learners establish why the situation is problematic. The question *"So what we what we what we must do for improve the public transportation?"* then shifts the interaction from identifying the problem to considering a possible response.

The learner proposes greater government attention, additional funding, and supervision, and supports this proposal by anticipating cleaner transportation and greater passenger comfort. The subsequent reasoning also considers increased use of public transportation and reduced congestion as possible outcomes of improved services. Justification therefore becomes evident in the support provided for greater government involvement, while Inference appears when the learner anticipates potential consequences of the proposed actions.

The interaction helps to explain why problem-solving generated substantial Causal Explanation and Justification. Learners could not address the task simply by identifying a problem or suggesting an action. They needed to connect existing conditions with their consequences and proposed actions with their likely outcomes. Questions helped shift the interaction from identifying the problem toward considering possible actions, while reasons made the proposed actions understandable and supportable to the other participants.

Across the three activities, questioning and reason-giving emerged in response to different communicative requirements. Role-play required learners to resolve missing information or negotiate practical choices so that the interaction could continue. Discussion required them to engage with contrasting viewpoints and explain the basis of their judgments. Problem-solving required them to move from identifying a problem toward developing and supporting a possible solution. These interactional differences provided distinct opportunities for particular speech acts and critical-thinking orientations to become verbally observable.

Illocutionary Functions of Questioning and Reason-Giving

This finding aligns [Darong \(2024\)](#) and [Hidayat et al. \(2022\)](#), who demonstrate that classroom utterances perform communicative actions shaped by speakers' intentions and interactional contexts. The present study provides a more context-specific account by showing that the same function

could address different immediate needs across speaking activities. Information Seeking helped learners resolve missing information during role-play, encouraged perspectives that had not yet been expressed during discussion, and directed attention toward possible responses in problem-solving activities. These findings therefore extend broader speech-act classifications by demonstrating how questioning and reason-giving functioned as flexible pragmatic resources whose specific uses were shaped by the local demands of the interaction.

Critical-Thinking Orientations Expressed through Questioning and Reason-Giving

This pattern supports [Akatsuka \(2019\)](#) association between questioning and higher-order thinking in language learning and is consistent with [Andania et al. \(2024\)](#), who identify directive speech acts as linguistic resources that can promote critical engagement in oral EFL interaction. The present findings offer a more specific account by demonstrating which pragmatic functions were associated with particular orientations in learners' actual spoken contributions rather than treating questioning itself as evidence of critical thinking.

The relationship between Defense of Argument and Evaluation demonstrates why evaluative reasoning cannot be identified merely through the expression of a preference. Evaluation becomes observable when learners provide criteria, comparisons, or anticipated consequences to support their judgments. This finding is consistent with [Tiasadi \(2020\)](#), whose participants perceived debating practice as beneficial for developing critical-thinking skills. The present study contributes a pragmatic perspective by showing how evaluative reasoning can be expressed through the specific function of defending a position.

Its limited verbal occurrence should not be taken as evidence that learners did not engage in internal self-regulation. The activities more often required learners to examine causes, consequences, viewpoints, and possible solutions than to explicitly reconsider or revise their own reasoning. Since the analysis focused on spoken interaction, only instances of Self-Regulation that became verbally expressed could be identified.

Overall, the second finding demonstrates that questioning and reason-giving were not automatically associated with particular critical-thinking orientations. Information Seeking most frequently intersected with Analysis, Causal Explanation with both Analysis and Explanation, and Defense of Argument with Evaluation. However, these relationships depended on the reasoning expressed within each interaction. Critical-thinking orientations should be understood as context-sensitive interpretations of spoken reasoning rather than as fixed characteristics of particular linguistic forms or measure of learners' overall critical-thinking ability.

Communicative Demands and the Emergence of Questioning and Reason-Giving

This finding aligns with [Horváthová and Beňušková \(2025\)](#), who identify role-play, dialogue, and information-gap tasks as relevant forms of transactional speaking practice. The present finding provides a more specific explanation of this process by showing that role-play encouraged questioning

and reason-giving when learners needed to resolve missing information or negotiate a practical choice before completing the exchange.

[Hadi et al. \(2021\)](#) similarly report that structured debate can provide opportunities for learners to examine issues, develop positions, and communicate their reasoning. The present findings provide a more specific interactional account by showing that discussion encouraged questioning and reason-giving because learners were required to elaborate on, compare, question, and defend viewpoints introduced by other participants.

This finding is consistent with [Wardah and Rosnija \(2023\)](#), who associate transactional speaking projects with communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. The present analysis provides a more specific explanation of how these processes became visible in interaction: learners identified problems, proposed practical responses, and provided reasons concerning the expected effects of those responses.

The findings indicate that questioning and reason-giving were shaped by the demands of the speaking activities in which they occurred. Role-play, discussion, and problem-solving created different communicative needs, which encouraged different forms of questioning and reason-giving and made particular critical-thinking orientations visible during interaction. Role-play primarily required learners to obtain information and make practical decisions, discussion encouraged them to examine and respond to different viewpoints, while problem-solving required them to explain problems and support possible solutions. These differences suggest that the three activities provided distinct interactional conditions for learners to express reasoning through their spoken interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that questioning and reason-giving in EFL spoken interaction performed different illocutionary functions and reflected different critical-thinking orientations. Learners used questions to seek information, clarify previous contributions, and introduce new conversational focuses, while reason-giving allowed them to explain causes, justify choices, and defend positions. These speech acts were not automatically associated with particular critical-thinking orientations; instead, their interpretation depended on the content of the utterance, its pragmatic function, and its position within the interaction. The speaking activities also created different conditions for these speech acts to emerge. Role-play primarily required learners to resolve information gaps and make practical decisions, discussion encouraged them to examine and respond to contrasting viewpoints, while problem-solving required them to clarify issues and support possible solutions.

These findings suggest that speaking activities can be designed to create communicative situations in which learners are required to ask relevant questions, provide reasons, justify choices, and respond to alternative viewpoints. Such activities may also allow for learners to clarify information, explain the basis of their judgments, and

connect their responses to ideas previously discussed in the interaction, while providing opportunities for critical-thinking orientations to become verbally observable through spoken interaction. These considerations may inform the design of speaking tasks, learning objectives, and assessment criteria that attend not only to language performance but also to pragmatic appropriateness and expressed reasoning. Future research could examine similar patterns in other EFL contexts and incorporate additional sources of evidence to explore aspects of critical thinking that may not be explicitly verbalized expressed in classroom interaction.

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