

A thematic analysis of examiners' questions in master's students' thesis oral examination

Agus Widiantoro*, Siti Mukminatun, Asfar Arif Nurharjanto, and Indah Permatasari

English Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Jl. Kolombo No.1, Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Oral examinations in higher education context have been an under-explored genre in academic discourse since it is not easily accessible for public, rendering a complexity in understanding examiners' expectations during the exam. Having adequate repertoire of the examiners' questions among the students being assessed can lead to successful oral defense without exception among Master's students. Hence, this research aims to explore the typical questions asked by the examiners during Master's students' thesis oral examination. Seventeen recorded oral examination videos involving four examiners in the Indonesian higher education context were collected with the consent from the participants involved in the videos. They were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to explore the types of examiners' questions. The findings demonstrate that there were five main categories of questions typically posed by the examiners in order from the most frequently appeared to the least one: (1) questions clarifying specific points in the thesis report or presentation, (2) questions related to the linkage between research method and findings, (3) questions related to the review of literature, (4) general preliminary questions, and (5) questions regarding the process of recruiting or selecting research participants. Questions revealed in each category also represent a particular purpose during the examination process. The results can be used as a reference for graduate students in preparing their oral defense.

Keywords: Master's students; oral examination; questions; thematic analysis; thesis examiners

Received:

10 February 2024

Accepted:

6 September 2024

Revised:

31 August 2024

Published:

30 September 2024

How to cite (in APA style):

Widiantoro, A., Mukminatun, S., Nurharjanto, A. A., & Permatasari, I. (2024). A thematic analysis of examiners' questions in master's students' thesis oral examination. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 220-228. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v14i2.74891>

INTRODUCTION

Although it has been an under-explored genre in academic discourse in higher education context, thesis oral examination has been considered a pivotal parameter to assess students' cumulative knowledge and skills in doing an empirical study and in reporting the results in front of the examiners. Such oral examination is used to validate students' research abilities, assess students' repertoire of the subject matter, and measure the extent to which the students can report and defend their scientific work (Carr & Sun, 2021; Mayengo, 2020; Mengistu, 2020). Oral exams can also escalate deep learning and ensure whether the students can maintain academic integrity in accordance with certain cultural contexts (Hurford, 2020). Previously

associated with thesis defense, the candidates defend their theses before a panel. The viva is now being adopted more broadly across various academic levels and disciplines. This resurgence reflects a growing recognition of the need for assessment methods that can comprehensively evaluate not only knowledge but also a range of cognitive and communicative skills. It becomes a means for real-time interaction and assessment, ensuring that evaluations can capture a student's ability to articulate and defend their understanding effectively (Ward et al., 2023).

The thesis oral examination offers distinct advantages over conventional written examinations. First and foremost, they enable a more holistic evaluation of student competencies. Beyond testing

*Corresponding author
Email: agus_widiantoro@uny.ac.id

factual knowledge, the oral exam assesses critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and communication skills. Students are required to articulate their thoughts coherently, defend their positions, and respond to probing questions, simulating real-world scenarios where such skills are indispensable (Roh et al., 2023). Unlike written exams or reports, oral assessments require students to engage in real-time dialogue with examiners, demonstrating their depth of knowledge and ability to articulate complex ideas. According to Brammer and Ames (2021), this interaction allows examiners to probe beyond the surface level of the candidate's work, asking questions that require critical thinking and synthesis of knowledge across different areas.

Moreover, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced text-generation technologies like ChatGPT has heightened concerns about the authenticity of written exam. Oral exam mitigates these concerns by requiring students to engage in spontaneous dialogue, reducing the likelihood of academic dishonesty. As academic institutions seek to uphold the integrity of the examination process, the thesis oral examination's ability to foster genuine intellectual engagement and critical thinking is increasingly valued (Aricò, 2022).

As viewed from its conventional stages, the thesis oral examination usually starts with the students presenting the summary of their thesis and then followed by a question-answer session. Each examiner gets the opportunity to ask questions in the oral examination. However, the main examiner will get the first turn to ask questions and have more time to ask questions. An oral examination may include questions on the research process, difficulties encountered, implications of the results, and more general theoretical and methodological issues related to the topic of study. Thesis oral examination involves intricate use of linguistic resources and communicative functions to convince the examiners in giving the candidates good final grades. The communicative functions typically occurred during an oral defense include various speech acts like statements, interrogative utterances, and commands (Susilawati, 2019). Non-verbal or paralinguistic resources are often used to reinforce certain points or stress certain ideas being informed to the examiners.

Both verbal and nonverbal language play significant roles in these interactions (Mayrita et al., 2024). Examiners and students employ different linguistic strategies, with examiners using more structures with "proszę" (please) and students showing higher anxiety levels (Nur et al., 2022; Śmiełowska & Wabnic, 2020). The language used in these examinations often reflects academic and scientific styles, with differences in grammatical subjects, verb tense, and modal verbs between expert and novice writers (Kim & Na, 2012). In English as a Lingua Franca contexts, oral

examinations present unique challenges, requiring specific discursive skills and narrative co-construction (Bowles, 2017). Understanding these linguistic features can improve the quality of examination processes and inform academic writing instruction. The practice of oral examinations has been investigated in the last decade from different perspectives. This includes the viability of the oral exams in students' native language (Kaur et al., 2023), the move structure of students' academic oral presentations (Godo, 2023), conversation analysis of viva discussions (Betti & Mahdi, 2020), examination questions during oral assessments (Constantinou, 2020), the oral component in the final PhD examination (Kiley et al., 2018), feedback in the examiners' evaluation reports on the literature review of doctoral students' theses (Lubis et al., 2023; Starfield et al., 2017), strategies in coping with students' insufficient answers in oral examinations (Vonen et al., 2023), the exploration of key purposes of PhD viva (Tan, 2023); variety of approaches to oral assessment (Beccaria, 2013; Kragh Ekstam & Andersson, 2023; Theobald, 2021; Ward et al., 2023), academic integrity in oral examinations (Thomas et al., 2014), and the impact of AI technology such as ChatGPT on the practice of oral examination (Yung et al., 2024).

The results generally show that oral examinations in higher education context are complex and dynamic, requiring the students to have adequate presentation and communication skills. In the UK, the oral exam typically highlights the examiners checking candidate's understanding and ability, clarifying weak areas, and testing candidate's oral skills. Furthermore, Trafford (2003) in Kiley et al. (2018) identified areas of questions during 25 PhD vivas, including issues with the research problems, content, structure, research question, choice of topic, location of the study, and implications to the wider literature. Linguistically, Constantinou (2020) found that the question words 'what', 'why', and 'how' are typically used, as compared to imperative sentences during the examiner-examinee interaction with action verbs 'discuss', 'explain', and 'assess' are quite dominant.

Although examiners' questions have been investigated quite recently, the results of thematic analysis of examiners' questions in the oral examinations of Indonesian Master's students has not been well-informed. Previous studies (Constantinou, 2020; Kaur et al., 2023; Trafford, 2003) examine composition of questions and oral examination stages in PhD vivas. Additionally, some studies focused more on the students' performances in oral exam (Betti & Mahdi, 2020; Godo, 2023; Kaur et al., 2023; Vonen et al., 2023), leaving out a question what types of questions typically exposed by the examiners to the candidates in Master's thesis oral exams. Examiners' questions have ever been mapped out by previous research

(Lubis et al., 2023; Starfield et al., 2017), albeit in their written evaluation reports.

Hence, the present study aims to fill the void by exploring the types of examiners' questions addressed to the Indonesian Master's students during their thesis oral examinations. The following question drive this study.

1. What types of examiners' questions are typically occurred during the Indonesian Master's students' thesis oral examination?
2. How are the questions linguistically addressed to the students?

METHOD

Research context

This study was conducted in a state university in Indonesia, that is, in a Master's study program, concerned with English Language Teaching. In order to finish their study, Master's students are required to write a thesis based on research. The writing of the thesis is supervised by a lecturer. After they finish writing the thesis, they will have to have an oral examination. The oral examination is an essential part of the academic assessment. In this examination, the students defend their thesis before a panel of examiners consisting of a chairperson, a secretary, a main examiner, and a supervisor. This panel of examiners may vary in different universities. This examination can be used for gauging the breadth of the students' knowledge, assessing their critical thinking, and finding out the contribution and novelty of the study. This examination is a kind of opportunity for the students to have an academic discussion or "debate" with subject-matter experts and to show their study design and findings. For the examiners, the oral

examination can be a chance to evaluate the students' critical thinking, capacity to respond under duress, and coherence in the presentation of complicated ideas.

Research data

This study analyses the examiners' questions during the Indonesian Master's thesis oral examination. The data were collected from 17 video-recorded oral examinations at a state university in Indonesia. There were four examiners involved in the entire videos. The recordings were transcribed manually to ease the researchers in labelling the examiners' questions. The transcripts contain 109.895 words in total with the average number of 6464 words per transcript. The oral examination was conducted in English and the students were given 10 to 15 minutes to present their research report. Examiners will pose several questions to the students after the presentation is finished.

Data collection procedure

The first step of the procedure in conducting the research was to obtain the permission for accessing the videos of the thesis oral examination. The seventeen videos were selected based on the variation of the examiners involved and the variation of the research topics in the students' theses. After all videos were collected from the study program, the researchers developed the coding scheme from Constantinou's (2020) features of examination questions, Trafford's (2003) areas of questions in PhD vivas, and Starfield et al.'s (2017) categories of examiners' evaluation to students' thesis. Table 1 below exhibits the domains of examiners' questions during students' thesis exam in the previous research.

Table 1

Comparison of Frameworks Regarding the Domains of Examiners' Questions

Starfield et al. (2017)	Constantinou (2020)	Trafford (2003) in Kiley et al. (2018)
Explanation for or definition of key terms	Elicitation (students' competence in a subject)	Resolving research problems, content, and structure
Reflection on the content of the candidate's report	Mediation (a variety of knowledge and/or skills)	The research question, choice of topic, location of study
Clarification for certain points	Domain-level specificity (specialised vocabulary or particular subject area)	The implications, awareness of, the wider literature
Change or correction for grammar, punctuation, and spelling issues	Task-level specificity (clarity of information or resources used)	Defense of doctorateness
Understanding of literature		

Then, the researchers attempted to read the first transcript using the three frameworks above to first locate the possible domains of examiners' questions appeared in the present study. At last, it is decided to employ all domains across the frameworks to accommodate various types of data.

Data analysis procedure

A thematic analysis method was employed to analyze the data since it involves identifying,

analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the existing data. This resonates with the research objectives, concerned with the typical domains of examiners' questions during a thesis oral examination as well as its linguistic realization. This method is widely used across various fields, from psychology to social sciences, to explore complex phenomena and gain deep insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and motivations. As a versatile tool, thematic analysis can adapt to

different research questions and contexts, making it invaluable for qualitative researchers. The process of conducting thematic analysis in the present study involved six key phases (as referred to Braun & Clarke, 2006), as follows.

1. **Familiarization with the Data:** This initial step involved immersing oneself in the data to gain a comprehensive understanding. The researchers read and re-read the first transcript, making initial notes particularly on the examiners' questions.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** During this phase, the researchers systematically coded each question, based on the categorization

in the three frameworks mentioned earlier. Coding involves identifying segments of data that are relevant to the research questions and labeling them with descriptive tags. However, new codes were also formulated for some questions appeared in the transcripts. **Searching for Themes:** The coded data were then sorted into potential themes. This step involved grouping codes into broader categories that reflect meaningful patterns within the dataset. Table 2 below depicts the sample of analysis results.

Table 2
Sample of Analysis Results

Examiners' utterances	Code	Categorization
Why are you interested in developing reading materials?	Questioning the urgency of the research	General preliminary question
What is the difference between with the previous ones?	Questioning the gap of previous research	General preliminary question

3. **Reviewing Themes:** In this phase, the researchers continued the analysis of the rest of the transcripts using the coding scheme and categorization already made before as the reference. Themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the data. The researchers checked if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset.
4. **Defining and Naming Themes:** The researchers conducted a detailed analysis of each theme, defining its scope and focus. This step involved identifying the core essence of each theme and determining what aspect of the data it captures. At last, there were four major themes appeared in the data sets regarding the domains of examiners' questions: (1) general preliminary questions, (2) questions for clarifying certain points in the document or in the presentation, (3) questions related to the literature review, (4) questions related to data, data collection techniques, and findings, and (5) questions related to the selection of the sample/participants/subjects.
5. **Producing the Report:** The final phase involved writing up the analysis. The researchers presented a coherent description and explanation that integrates the themes with vivid examples from the data to support the analysis. Prior to writing up the analysis, the results were cross-checked to ensure its credibility.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As many as 378 questions were identified in the entire transcripts. Questions for clarifying certain points in the document or presentation were dominant with 138 occurrences, followed by questions related to data, data collection techniques, and findings. Meanwhile, general preliminary questions such as asking the students' readiness to do the oral exam and the research background were less frequently posed by the examiners to the Master's candidates. What seems interesting is that the examiners were slightly more concerned with the review of related literature than the selection of the research sample/participants/subjects with 55 and 44 occurrences, respectively. This means that the examiners have a tendency to ask the students to give clarification for certain points in their research reports, explain the research procedure, and provide elaboration on the main literature used in the papers. The details of the questions in each category are presented in the following sections.

RQ 1: What types of examiners' questions are typically occurred during the Indonesian Master's students' thesis oral examination?

General preliminary questions

In the beginning of the oral examination, in the question-and-answer section, the examiners usually ask preliminary questions. These questions usually ask about the reason for investigating a certain topic and the gap in the investigation. Another important topic often in the preliminary questions is a question about the difference between the research done by the students and the previous studies. A question about the urgency in conducting the study was also asked by the examiner. The following is an example of the excerpt from the oral assessment.

Excerpt 1

Examiner: Well, why are you interested in developing reading materials?

Examiner: First maybe, err err first maybe questions may be addressed by any of us. Why is this topic twenty first century competences a sexy topic to investigate?

Examiner: Firstly, emm you investigated chat GPT in the EFL context, from the viewpoint of critical thinking skills. Actually, what is the research gap?

Examiner: So, you mention that there are so many other studies err have been done by experts related to the difficulties of learning pronunciation for specific err learners for Yamani learners. So, what is the difference between the previous ones? The difference between your research and the previous ones?

Examiner: So, what is the urgency in conducting this research?

The strategic use of preliminary questions offers several benefits. Firstly, they serve as a diagnostic tool, allowing examiners to gauge the student's baseline understanding and confidence level. This approach helps in tailoring subsequent questions to the student's competency, ensuring a fair and effective assessment process (Aricò, 2022). Moreover, these questions help in building a logical progression in the viva. Starting with simpler, foundational topics and gradually moving to more complex ones allows the assessment to unfold naturally, making it easier for students to demonstrate their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Abuzied & Nabag, 2023).

Questions for clarifying certain points in the document or in the presentation

The next questions asked by the thesis oral assessment examiners are used for clarifying certain points in the students' thesis or presentation. In the following excerpt, the examiners ask the examinees to clarify the terms "limited materials", "authentic materials", and "the difference between English sound system and Arabic sound system". When the examinee could not answer correctly, the examiner even then gave an explanation related to the question. This can be seen from the excerpt related to "authentic materials". Because the examinee's answer was not correct, the examiner then explained what was meant by "authentic materials".

Excerpt 2

Examiner: What do you mean by limited materials?

Examiner: No, No that's not authentic materials ya. Authentic materials are materials that are not planned to be used for the teaching learning process, ya. So for example you have err err eerr magazines magazines or labels in different products. They are authentic materials.

Examiner: So, you study all aspects of pronunciation not only one aspect of phonemes

Examiner: So, can you explain can you explain to us the differences between English sound system and Arabic sound system?

Examiner: You stated in your finding that chat GPT foster creativity, collaboration, reflection. The first one, creativity. How can chat GPT foster student creativity?

Questions for clarification are essential tools in effective communication, helping to ensure that messages are correctly understood and interpreted. These questions typically seek to confirm or clarify the meaning of information received, prevent misunderstandings, and facilitate deeper engagement. For example, in educational settings, students might ask teachers to elaborate on a complex topic, while in professional environments, employees might seek further details about project requirements.

In 2023, the importance of clarification questions is particularly highlighted in remote work and virtual learning contexts, where non-verbal cues are limited. A report by **Harvard Business Review** notes that in virtual meetings, clarification questions can bridge gaps that arise due to the lack of physical presence, ensuring that all participants remain aligned and engaged (Harvard Business Review, 2023).

Questions related to the literature review

The following excerpt showed questions about the literature review. The literature view was an essential component in the thesis document. This part is used as the basis for the design of the study.

Excerpt 3

Examiner: Do you discuss this matter the differences between the English sound system and Arabic sound system in your literature review? In chapter two. Do you have this?

Examiner: OK, so my suggestion is related to the literature review actually. So you need to review err the English sound system and Arab sound system and then compare for ...

A literature review is a critical component of any thesis, acting as the cornerstone upon which the entire research framework is built. It is an evaluative report of information found in the literature related to the researcher's selected area of study. The literature review's significance extends beyond a mere summary of existing knowledge; it shapes the research questions, guides the methodological approach, and positions the new research within the broader academic dialogue.

One of the primary roles of the literature review is to establish the context and rationale for the thesis. By synthesizing existing research, the

review demonstrates how the current study fits into the broader academic landscape. It highlights gaps in the current knowledge, unresolved issues, or emerging trends that the thesis seeks to address. As noted by Creswell (2021), understanding the context is vital for identifying the unique contribution of the new research. For instance, if a thesis focuses on the impact of digital learning tools on student engagement, the literature review will explore previous studies on digital learning, engagement metrics, and educational outcomes. This examination not only clarifies what has been done but also identifies what is yet to be explored, thus justifying the necessity of the research.

A thorough literature review informs the research design and methodology of the thesis. By examining how other researchers have approached similar problems, it provides insights into effective methods, tools, and frameworks that can be applied or adapted for the new study. According to Machi and McEvoy (2022), this process helps in avoiding methodological pitfalls and enhances the robustness of the research design. A well-conducted literature review enhances the credibility and academic rigor of the thesis. It demonstrates the researcher's engagement with existing scholarship and their understanding of the research landscape. This engagement is essential for establishing the validity of the research questions and the relevance of the study. According to Booth et al. (2021), a comprehensive literature review signals to the academic community that the researcher has critically evaluated the existing body of knowledge and has positioned their work within it. This positioning is crucial for gaining acceptance and recognition in the scholarly community.

Questions related to data, data collection techniques, and findings

In the following excerpt, the examiners asked about the data taken from the questionnaires. The first two excerpts focused on the integration of the Islamic values in the product produced by the student. The next statement further provided the information that no questions were found in the questionnaires developed by the examinee. The next excerpt was related to the data collection technique. The examiner suggested the examinee to record students' pronunciation performance. The next examiner asked about why the examinee used semi-structured interview in collecting data, not in-depth interview.

Excerpt 4

Examiner: Why did you integrate the Islamic values?

Examiner: But in your questionnaires, in your questionnaires, you do not include any questions related to the inclusion of Islamic values.

Examiner: What is the similarity between unit one, unit two, unit three, unit four etc.

Examiner: Do you also have reflection in each unit? Just show us.

Examiner: And now related to the method of data collection. It seems to me that you rely heavily on interview, with students and also with the teachers ya. Well actually when we want to find students' difficulties or challenges in pronunciation you can have a kind of diagnostic test so that we can record their pronunciation performance. Do you have this recording of students' pronunciation performance?

Examiner: It seems to me that you rely heavily on interview in collecting the data. Ya, interview and observation. Do you have the recording or did you record how students pronounce English

Examiner: Your research is a case study and you should explore anything in detail to get detailed information. But why did you employ semi-structured interview, not in-depth interview?

Examiner: How did you gather data?

Examiner: This is the last question. What is the most interesting finding of your study?

Examiner: So is there any finding, was there any finding of your study that was different from your expectation or prediction beyond your which is far from your prediction

In the realm of academic research, data stands as a cornerstone that validates and substantiates the findings of a thesis. Whether qualitative or quantitative, data provides the empirical evidence necessary to support hypotheses, answer research questions, and advance knowledge within a particular field. The collection, analysis, and interpretation of data are integral to the credibility, reliability, and overall success of a thesis.

At its core, data serves as the foundation for validating research hypotheses. A thesis often begins with a set of hypotheses or research questions that seek to explore relationships or phenomena within a given domain. Data collection and subsequent analysis provide the means to test these hypotheses rigorously. As pointed out by Trochim and Donnelly (2020), without data, hypotheses remain speculative and unsupported by empirical evidence.

The credibility and integrity of a thesis are significantly bolstered by robust and reliable data. A well-structured dataset collected through sound methodological practices enhances the trustworthiness of the research findings. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), the systematic collection and analysis of data underscore the rigor and objectivity of the research process. Data integrity is paramount; any inaccuracies or biases in data collection can compromise the validity of the research. Therefore, adhering to ethical standards and methodological rigor in data handling not only ensures the accuracy of findings but also upholds

the academic integrity of the thesis. This commitment to data quality fosters confidence among peers, reviewers, and the broader academic community.

Data collection techniques are fundamental to the integrity and success of a thesis. These techniques form the backbone of research by providing the means to gather accurate, reliable, and relevant data that underpin the research findings. The choice of data collection methods, whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed, significantly influences the validity and credibility of the research outcomes. As academic inquiry increasingly relies on evidence-based analysis, understanding and employing appropriate data collection techniques are more crucial than ever.

The primary role of data collection techniques is to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data gathered. Accurate data collection is essential for maintaining the validity of the research findings. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), selecting appropriate data collection methods is critical in minimizing errors and biases that can compromise the integrity of the research.

Effective data collection techniques are closely aligned with the research objectives and questions of the thesis. The choice of methods must correspond to the type of data needed to answer the research questions comprehensively. As highlighted by Bryman (2022), the alignment between data collection techniques and research aims is essential for obtaining relevant and meaningful data. The selection of data collection techniques directly impacts the scope and depth of data analysis. Different methods provide various types of data that can be analyzed using specific tools and techniques. As noted by Silverman (2021), understanding the nature of the data collected is crucial for employing the right analytical strategies.

Questions related to the selection of the sample/participants/subjects

In the following excerpt, the examiner asked the examinee about the selection of the sample. There are some kinds of sampling techniques used for selecting the sample. In this excerpt the examiner questioned why the examinee used the convenience sampling technique. The examiner thought that it was not appropriate to use the convenience sampling technique.

Excerpt 5

Examiner: Ya ya. And then you involved twenty-seven students. And you selected using the convenience sampling. Why did you use the convenience sampling technique in selecting the participants?

Sample selection is a critical aspect of the research design in a thesis, profoundly influencing the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the

study's findings. In research, a sample refers to a subset of individuals, items, or data points from a larger population. The process of choosing this subset is crucial because it determines how accurately the sample represents the broader population. Effective sample selection underpins the robustness of the research, ensuring that the conclusions drawn can be confidently extended to the larger group.

One of the primary reasons for careful sample selection is to ensure representativeness, which directly affects the generalizability of the research findings. Representativeness means that the sample accurately reflects the characteristics of the overall population. As Bryman (2022) explains, a well-chosen sample allows researchers to generalize their findings to the population with greater confidence.

Effective sample selection is vital for minimizing sampling bias, which occurs when the sample does not accurately reflect the population. Sampling bias can significantly distort research outcomes, leading to invalid or unreliable conclusions. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), careful attention to sample selection helps mitigate such biases, enhancing the study's credibility.

The size of the sample is another crucial consideration in sample selection. An adequate sample size ensures that the study has sufficient statistical power to detect significant effects or differences. As noted by Trochim and Donnelly (2020), a sample that is too small may lead to inconclusive or non-generalizable results, while a sample that is too large can be unnecessarily resource-intensive.

RQ 2: How are the questions linguistically addressed to the students?

Understanding how the questions are typically realized is another crucial thing to better provide adequate and convincing answers or responses to the examiners. First, most questions typically started with the W-H question marks in a graded manner. The examiners pose questions requiring the students to activate their scanning and lower-order thinking skills such as “*what is your conceptual framework?*” or “*what are the dimensions of students’ engagement?*” Then, the examiners attempted to engage the students with further elaboration and more critical answers involving higher-order thinking skills to address the why, how, and what do you mean questions such as “*how did you measure the variables?*” or “*why did you select SMP St. Thomas 1 Medan as your research setting?*” This reinforces previous research (Constantinou, 2020) that sentences with W-H question marks were more evident than imperative sentences during the examiner-examinee interaction. Some questions were identified using auxiliary verbs such as *did you consider...* and *have you*

reviewed... or modal verbs such as *can you explain...* to obtain students' confirmation regarding specific concern as well as to measure the students' argumentative skills in elaborating answers.

Furthermore, the oral examination renders the typical use of engagement markers such as mentioning "you" many times, representing the candidates or explicit expressions with short sentences. Another typical linguistic feature of examiners' questions in oral examination is the use of reference expressions such as *based on..., we can see in your...* to invite the students re-examine the specific part in the reports. Last but not least, the examiners employ various expressions to give commands, not merely through the use of imperative sentences with the beginning word "please". Sometimes, they command the students to provide more explanation for specific point in their report using modal-verb questions such as *can you explain to us...?* and *how can ChatGPT foster...?* The use of engagement markers, reference expressions, and various expressions to give commands indicates the dynamic nature of examiner-examinee interactions during oral thesis examination. This resonates with Susilawati (2019), arguing that thesis defense involves the use of various speech acts.

CONCLUSION

The present study aims to explore the typical questions posed by the examiners during Master's students' thesis oral examination as well as the linguistic features in the questions. The findings indicate that examiners typically posed five main categories of questions, ranked from most to least frequent: (1) questions clarifying specific points in the thesis report or presentation, (2) questions regarding the connection between the research method and findings, (3) questions related to the review of literature, (4) general preliminary questions, and (5) questions concerning the process of recruiting or selecting research participants. Each category of questions reflects a distinct purpose within the examination process, highlighting the diverse areas of focus those examiners consider when assessing a thesis. The results can be a reference for developing courses focused on English for academic presentation purposes or seminar on foreign language teaching research so that the students can be prepared to make their oral examination successful and impactful. Further studies need to be taken into account regarding the results of pedagogical interventions, which can increase students' knowledge, attitude, and skills in reporting their scientific works using a foreign language.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers would like to thank Yogyakarta State University for funding this study.

REFERENCES

- Abuzied, A. I. H., & Nabag, W. O. M. (2023). Structured viva validity, reliability, and acceptability as an assessment tool in health professions education: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Medical Education, 23*(1), 531. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-023-04524-6>
- Aricò, F. R. (2022). Evaluative conversations: Unlocking the power of viva voce assessment for undergraduate students. In P. Baughan (Ed.), *Assessment and feedback in a post-pandemic era: A time for learning and inclusion* (pp. 47-56). Advance HE.
- Beccaria, G. (2013). The viva voce as an authentic assessment for clinical psychology students. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 22*(3), 139-142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1038416213498713>
- Betti, M. J., & Mahdi, M. A. (2020). A conversation analysis of repair trouble sources, inadequacy and positions in the Iraqi university viva discussions in English. *International Linguistics Research, 3*(4), 69-93. <https://doi.org/10.30560/ilr.v3n4p69>
- Booth, A., Sutton, A., & Papaioannou, D. (2021). *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bryman, A. (2022). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Carr, S., & Sun, S. (2022). Ensuring accuracy and quality for oral examinations in translation. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 47*(6), 830-842. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.1972929>
- Carter, B., & Whittaker, K. (2009). Examining the British PhD viva: Opening new doors or scarring for life? *Contemporary Nurse, 32*(1-2), 169-178. <https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.32.1-2.169>
- Constantinou, F. (2020). Examination questions as a form of communication between the examiner and the examinee: A sociolinguistic perspective on assessment practice. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 50*(6), 711-728. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1761293>
- Creswell, J. W. (2021). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.

- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Kaur, A., Kumar, V., & Noman, M. (2023). The viability of doctoral thesis and oral exams in student's native language. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2271976>
- Kiley, M., Holbrook, A., Lovat, T., Fairbairn, H., Starfield, S., & Paltridge, B. (2018). An oral component in PhD examination in Australia: Issues and considerations. *Australian Universities' Review, The*, 60(1), 25-34. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1169164.pdf>
- Kragh Ekstam, A., & Andersson, P. (2023). Oral health status using the revised oral assessment guide and mortality in older orthopaedic patients: A cross-sectional study. *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, 18, 1103-1113. <https://doi.org/10.2147/CIA.S410577>
- Machi, L. A., & McEvoy, B. T. (2022). *The literature review: Six steps to success*. Corwin Press.
- Mayengo, N. (2020). Overcoming the Viva Voce examination obstacle at postgraduate research. In *Postgraduate research engagement in low resource settings* (pp. 97-114). IGI Global.
- Mengistu, A. A. A critical discourse analysis of teacher-student interaction in MA thesis oral examination: Reflections from Ethiopia. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 10(1), 356-370. <https://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v10i01.037>
- Harvard Business Review. (2023). *How to communicate effectively in virtual meetings*. <https://hbr.org/2023/01/how-to-communicate-effectively-in-virtual-meetings>
- Silverman, D. (2021). *Qualitative research*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Starfield, S., Paltridge, B., McMurtrie, R., Holbrook, A., Lovat, T., Kiley, M., & Fairbairn, H. (2017). Evaluation and instruction in PhD examiners' reports: How grammatical choices construe examiner roles. *Linguistics and Education*, 42, 53-64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.07.008>
- Theobald, A. S. (2021). Oral exams: A more meaningful assessment of students' understanding. *Journal of Statistics and Data Science Education*, 29(2), 156-159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26939169.2021.1914527>
- Thomas, J., Raynor, M., & McKinnon, M. (2014). Academic integrity and oral examination: An Arabian Gulf perspective. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 51(5), 533-543. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2013.796724>
- Trochim, W. M., & Donnelly, J. P. (2020). *The research methods knowledge base*. Atomic Dog Publishing.
- Vonen, M. N., Solem, M. S., & Skovholt, K. (2023). Managing students' insufficient answers in oral examinations. *Classroom Discourse*, 14(3), 258-280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463014.2022.2079694>
- Ward, M., O'Riordan, F., Logan-Fleming, D., Cooke, D., Concannon-Gibney, T., Efthymiou, M., & Watkins, N. (2023). Interactive oral assessment case studies: An innovative, academically rigorous, authentic assessment approach. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2023.2251967>
- Yung, R., Moyle, B., & Yang, E. C. L. (2024). Mitigating the impact of ChatGPT: Cultivating professional identity through interactive oral authentic assessments. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2024.2331516>