

# TA-Student VQA: Multi-Agents Training by Self-Questioning

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## Abstract

There are two main challenges in Visual Question Answering (VQA). The first one is that each model obtains its strengths and shortcomings when applied to several questions; what is more, the “ceiling effect” for specific questions is difficult to overcome with simple consecutive training. The second challenge is that even the state-of-the-art dataset is of large scale, questions targeted at a single image are off in format and lack diversity in content. We introduce our self-questioning model with multi-agent training: TA-student VQA. This framework differs from standard VQA algorithms by involving question-generating mechanisms and collaborative learning between question-answering agents. Thus, TA-student VQA overcomes the limitation of the content diversity and format variation of questions and improves the overall performance of multiple question-answering agents. We evaluate our model on VQA-v2 [1], which outperforms algorithms without such mechanisms. In addition, TA-student VQA achieves a greater model capacity, allowing it to answer more generated questions in addition to those in the annotated datasets.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Visual Question Answering (VQA) has garnered significant attention [45, 16, 35, 51], as it relates to multidisciplinary research such as natural language understanding [58], visual information retrieval [19, 62], and multi-modal reasoning [4, 39]. Many methods [56, 18] have been developed in this field with datasets [36, 65, 59, 1, 15, 21, 25] for different purposes. However, for each high-performing algorithm focusing on one aspect, the algorithm obtains respective drawbacks in other aspects (e.g., some algorithms that are good at color-related questions but are not experts at reasoning, whereas other algorithms are proficient at the latter and vice versa). Meanwhile, there is a crucial point where, during their training phase, even when the question datasets are of a large scale, the number of Q/A

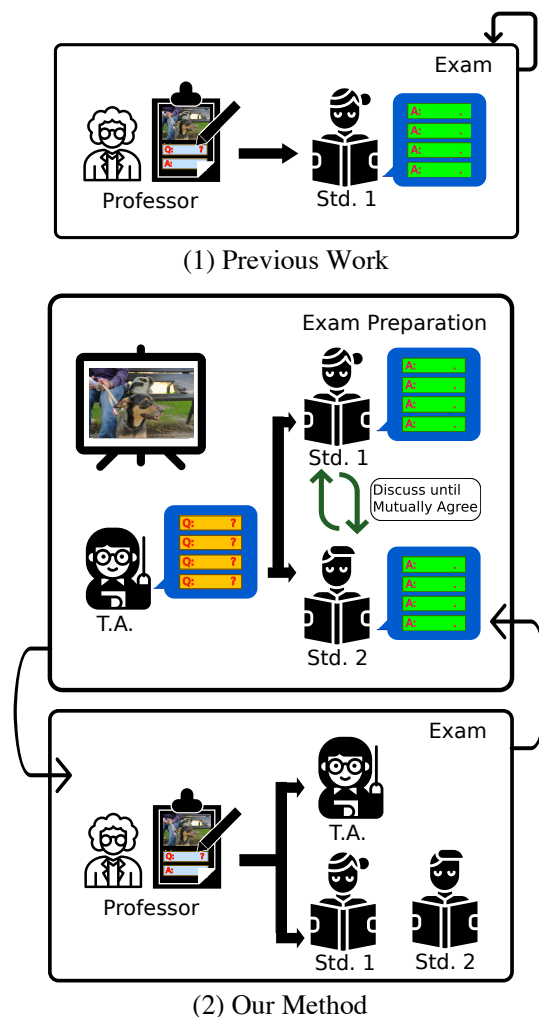


Figure 1: (1) Previous work only has one student agent to train on the annotated data. (2) The TA-Student VQA paradigm. We proposed a framework for Visual Question Answering (VQA) in which the TA agent generate questions by the given image, and two student agents answer them. As their answers converge, question-answer pairs from annotated dataset will be used to evaluate these agents, and update them. This method breaks through the barriers caused by limited problems for one image, and takes advantage of the strengths for two student agents.

pairs for one image is limited. Such insufficiency is not only found in the format of questions with similar semantics but also in the lack of image-targeted questions.

Regarding the training aspect of visual questions as exam preparation and the testing part as the final exam (Figure 1), previous work used the annotated data to train one model and updated the parameters using the result. This scenario is similar to when a student prepares for an exam along. The student can only improve himself by taking the exam; however, empirically, the exam questions are limited, which leads to a difficulty in reinforcing learning and a lack of generalization. In our work, we involve an agent that plays a similar role as a teaching assistant (*TA*), therein generating questions based on the given image. In addition, we introduce the idea of using two Question-Answering Agents (*Agts*) to realize collaborative learning, similar to two students preparing for their exams without a solution manual; they can only make progress by discussing the topic with each other.

#### Our main contributions are the following:

1. We overcome the barrier whereby the training Q/A pairs for each image are limited in addressing the deficiency in the model capacity by adding a TA model to the system.
2. We utilize two Question-Answering Agents (*Agts*) in the self-questioning stage in a collaborative learning manner to combine the advantages of the two methods.
3. We obtain a better understanding of the given image through the process of self-QA, therein applying a strategy to select the most informative questions/content to best improve the visual question-answering performance.

## 2. Related Work

### 2.1. Visual Question Answering

Many visual question-answering algorithms have been proposed recently. These algorithms can be divided into four main categories. The first category is **standard deep learning models**, which typically use convolutional neural networks (CNNs) [26] to embed the image and implement recurrent neural networks (RNNs) (*e.g.*, long short-term memory units (LSTMs) [20] and gated recurrent units (GRUs) [8]) to embed natural language. Methods such as [63, 13] merge visual and textural features directly, while [46, 34, 36] put these features into a new network to achieve the combination. Although such standard deep learning methods do not always obtain excellent performance, standard methods have established milestones in the VQA task and preserve intuition in discovering the relationships between these two types of features. The second category is **attention-based deep learning techniques**.

Such mechanisms are often applied by focusing on key parts of images, questions, or both [32], thereby effectively targeting output answers. Methods such as [48, 64, 57, 60] achieve good results for the task. However, they suffer from certain shortcomings, similar to standard deep learning methods. Utilizing human attention or performing direct learning does not eliminate the problem whereby deep learning methods lack good interpretable reasoning and can obtain a fairly good result just by simply memorizing statistics about the Q/A pairs. This leads to the deficiency in model capacity, that is, if you ask a question in a tone that is different from the questions in the training and testing sets in terms of format or content, even if the question is related to the image, the model will produce poor results. Despite deep learning approaches dominating the VQA field, **non-deep learning approaches** often create innovation by offering interpretative features or intermediate results. Related work, such as [23, 35, 28], attempts to build a probability model and infer hidden information to complete the model. Such methods are unlikely to suffer from overfitting and can preserve generalization. Despite this, they require feature engineering, and empirically, it takes time to choose a model adapted to new problems. **Knowledge base support methods** are another type of algorithm, including [54, 50, 37, 52, 33, 40], and utilize facts about objects in the image and their relationships. These methods show their strength in difficult cases that need the assistance of external knowledge. However, such strength requires extra time and effort for building the knowledge bases.

Currently, VQA methods retain their strengths but lack image understanding. The limitation of Q/A pairs in the dataset also leads to a lack of generalization of the model. Our self-QA method overcomes the limitation of the annotated dataset, thereby achieving the generation of informative questions based on the given image and avoiding the influence of the deficiency in the model capacity.

### 2.2. Visual Question Generation

As an interdisciplinary direction of image captioning [27, 11, 9, 7, 10], visual question generation [24, 61, 42] has been recently proposed as a method to generate questions rather than captions based on a given image. A good generated question should be tightly focused on images rather than on general statements such as “What is in this picture?”. Our TA-Student VQA system is highly relevant. However, the main difference with our method is that, instead of generating questions that maximize the mutual information between the image and the question, our method focuses more on generating questions that will most benefit the Question-Answering Agents. More specifically, if a question such as “What is in this picture?” helps improve the Question-Answering Agents’ performance, then it will be a good question for our model.

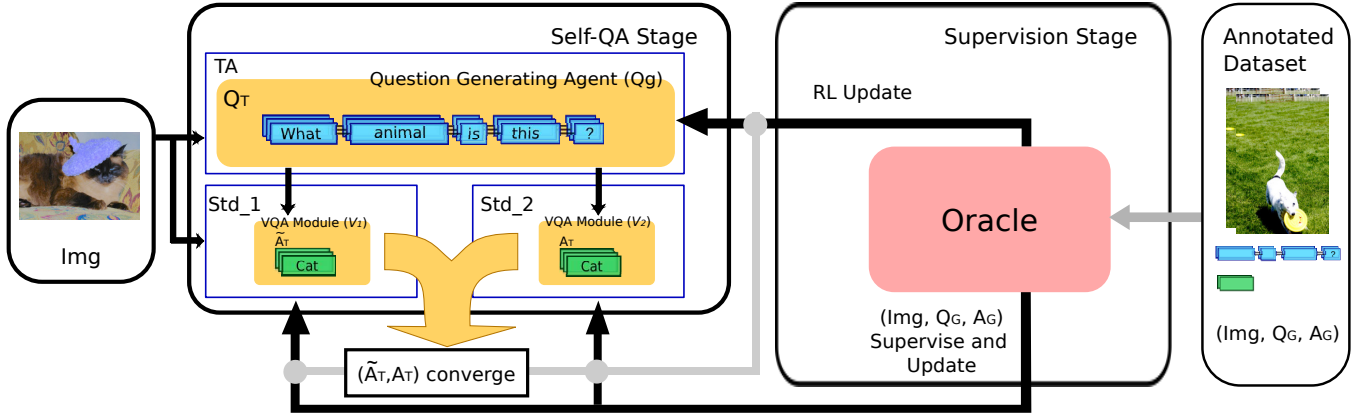


Figure 2: Overview of our approach. The system consists of two stages, Self-QA stage and Supervision Stage, and these two stages will execute iteratively. In the first stage, there are three agents, one question proposal agent  $TA$  and two question answering agent  $Std_1$  and  $Std_2$ . Once  $TA$  agent proposes questions  $Q_T$ ,  $Std_1$  and  $Std_2$  will output corresponding answer  $\hat{A}_T$  and  $A_T$ . Once the answers converge, the second stage begins. *Oracle* will supervise models in Self-QA block, based on the result to update the parameters of  $Std_1$  and  $Std_2$ , and use reinforcement learning method to update the parameters of  $TA$ .

### 2.3. Boosting Method

Boosting refers to a group of algorithms that turn weak learners into strong learners; more specifically, it is an ensemble method for improving the model predictions of a learning algorithm. The idea of boosting is to train weak learners sequentially, each attempting to correct its predecessor. Boosting was first introduced in [12], and later works, such as [2, 6], have also followed the same path to achieve better training of weak classifiers. Our method converts this idea into collaborative learning, and two Question-Answering Agents are trained consecutively to improve the prediction performance.

### 2.4. Generative Adversarial Network

Generative adversarial networks (GANs) were first proposed in [17]; they estimate generative models via an adversarial process. The main idea is to simultaneously train the generative model ( $G$ ) and the discriminative model ( $D$ ).  $G$  is responsible for capturing the data distribution, while  $D$  is responsible for estimating the probability that a sample came from the training data rather than  $G$ . Many works [53, 41, 49] have used GANs to perform image synthesis and image retrieval. We borrow this adversarial idea for our TA-Student VQA system by adversarially generating questions for a given image and evaluating the generated questions by our Question-Answering Agents and Oracle.

## 3. Approach

### 3.1. Overview

We now formally introduce a new approach called TA-Student VQA. The test phase of the VQA task can be formatted as finding the correct answer  $a$  in the space of candidate answer words  $Ans$  by  $\text{argmax}_a P(a | Img, Q_G), a \in$

$Ans$ , where  $Img$  is the given image from the dataset and  $Q_G$  is the corresponding question. However, for the training phase, unlike previous methods of VQA, we alter the strategy by involving a self-QA stage. A  $TA$  model is responsible for raising questions ( $Q_T$ ) for the given image  $Img$ , and two  $VQA$  models are set to output corresponding answers ( $A_T$  and  $\hat{A}_T$ ). Once  $A_T$  and  $\hat{A}_T$  converge, the supervision stage is performed. There is an oracle  $O$  that asks questions ( $Q_G$ ) from the dataset, while the ground-truth answers ( $A_G$ ) combined with  $Q_G$  and  $Img$  are used to update the two  $VQA$  models and  $TA$  model.

To facilitate self-questioning, it is possible to build two agents, each responsible for both generating questions and answering them; however, to obtain a tight structure and clear delineation of responsibilities, we design the system as illustrated in Figure 2. Our proposed method consists of two stages, the self-QA stage and the supervision stage. The first stage includes the Question Generating Agent ( $Q_g$ ) and two Visual Question Answering Agents ( $Agts$ ), which will be introduced in detail in Section 3.2 and Section 3.3, respectively. The second stage concerns how the oracle ( $O$ ) updates the parameters of  $Agts$  and  $Q_g$ , which will be explained in Section 3.4.

### 3.2. Question Generating Agent ( $Q_g$ )

The Question Generating Agent ( $Q_g$ ) acts as a  $TA$ , which is designed to generate a set of questions with diversity in format and content under the condition that they are related to the given image  $Img$ . To obtain these properties, three sub-models are built and combined: (1) the question generation model ( $g$ ), which is responsible for proposing questions based on the given image  $Img$ ; (2) the question validation model ( $v$ ), which checks if the generated questions are grammatically correct and relevant to the content; and (3)

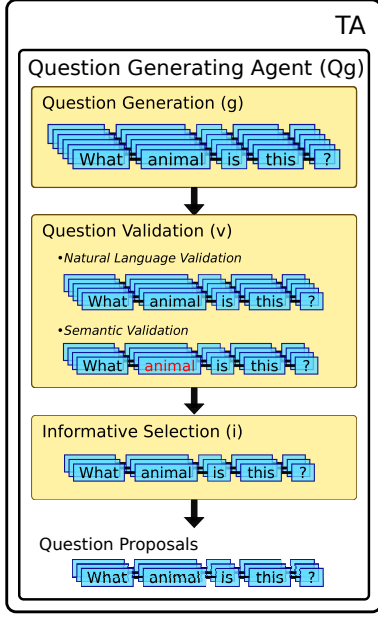


Figure 3: Question Generating Agent ( $Q_g$ ). A set of questions are proposed by Question Generation Model ( $g$ ), then these questions are filtered by Question Validation Model ( $v$ ), to achieve the grammarly validation and the content relevance of questions. The Informative Selection Model ( $i$ ) is used to select questions that contribute most to improve the Question Answering Agents ( $Agts$ ).

the informative selection model ( $i$ ), which selects the most informative questions from previous questions to improve the training efficiency. Figure 3 demonstrates the structure of  $Q_g$ .

#### – Question Generation Model ( $g$ )

This model generates questions  $Q_{T0}$  based on a given image  $Img$ , denoted as  $Q_{T0} = g(Img)$ . We build a structure similar to [38]. To better handle large-scale data [3], we use long short-term memory (LSTM) instead of gated recurrent units (GRUs). In addition, to improve the diversity of  $Q_{T0}$ , we use the question type as the first word of the generated question and randomly sample it before each generation. Here, we use the 64 types of question categories defined in [1].

#### – Question Validation Model ( $v$ )

To further filter the generated questions  $Q_{T0}$ , we design two mechanisms. The first mechanism is a grammar checker that ensures that the generated questions are valid in terms of natural language. The second mechanism checks whether the main components referred to in the question are present in the image  $Img$ , which avoids asking about an invalid object. To locate the subject of interest in the sentence, [5] is used to parse the question with grammatical relations. These

two checkers serve as filters to retain  $Q_{T1}$  from  $Q_{T0}$  with  $Q_{T1} = v(Q_{T0}, Img)$  and preserve more effective information.

#### – Informative Selection Model ( $i$ )

To select the most informative questions  $Q_{T2}$ , we propose the Informative Selection Model, which is a policy  $\pi(Q_{T2}|Img, Q_{T1}, \theta)$  used to select  $Q_{T2}$  by the given image  $Img$ ,  $Q_{T1}$  are the questions from the last model, and  $\theta$  are the parameters of this model.

The task now becomes a policy-learning problem. Given an image  $Img$  and a set of question candidates  $\{Q_{T2}(i) \in Q_{T2} : 1 \leq i \leq n\}$ , we output a policy containing a sequence of actions  $[a_1, a_2, a_3, \dots, a_n]$ .  $a_i$  is a binary value used to determine whether the question candidate  $Q_{T2}(i)$  is informative. There is no ground truth for each action but rather only a final reward indicating under such policy  $\pi$ , in other words, under the selected proposed questions  $Q_{T2}$  in this round, whether the prediction result in the supervision stage is significantly improved. The details will be provided in Section 3.4. We use Monte Carlo concepts to learn the policy, which will guide the question selection. Such a policy network requires an extra reward value in a loss.

$$L_{policy}(\theta) = \sum_{i \in \|Q_{T2}\|} \log \pi(a_i | Img, Q_{T1}, \theta) \ell(Q, A) \quad (1)$$

where  $a_i$  is the action taken based on the current status,  $\pi(\cdot)$  is the policy function that maps the status to actions, where the policy is the probability of outputting the next action module  $a_i$  based on the current status, and  $\ell(\cdot)$  is the softmax loss in the supervision stage based on the overall action module sequence  $[a_1, a_2, a_3, \dots, a_n]$ . Because all actions are discrete, which leads to a non-differentiable problem, back-propagation will not work. The policy gradient [29] is used instead during training.

We iteratively generate questions  $Q_{T2}$  until there are 100 question proposals, which are regarded as the output of this Question Generating Agent, denoted as  $Q_T$ . Model  $Q_g$  outputs question proposals that relieve the situation whereby the questions asked for images are limited, and the previously shown mechanisms guarantee that the questions are related and informative.

### 3.3. Question-Answering Agents ( $Agts$ )

Two Visual Question Answering Agents ( $Agts$ ) act as two students to answer the questions  $Q_T$  generated by the TA, which is  $Q_g$ . Their outputs,  $A_t$  and  $\hat{A}_T$ , are the results from two heterogeneous-structured Visual Question Answering models (the details of the two models will be provided in Section 3.5). Once  $A_t$  and  $\hat{A}_T$  "softly" converge



(which means that they obtain semantic similarity, as detected by [43]), this implies that after several rounds of discussion, these two students finally have come to an agreement. Then, it is time for the real exam, rather than the questions provided by the TA. In other words, the Oracle will act in supervision stage (Section 3.4), using  $(Img, Q_G, A_G)$  pairs from the annotated dataset to update the parameters in  $Q_g$  and the two  $Agts$ .

### 3.4. Oracle Check Model ( $O$ )

The Oracle Check Model ( $O$ ) works similarly as the model used to activate learning [47]; however, it does not label the answer of the generated questions  $Q_T$ . Instead, it computes its informative score, which is shown in Section 3.2, to decide if these questions help most during the training phase.

#### – Reinforcement Learning Update for Question Informative

Once  $A_t$  and  $\tilde{A}_T$  softly converge, the Oracle Check Model ( $O$ ) selects a few questions from the annotated dataset ( $Q_G$ ), and two  $Agts$  output their corresponding answers; the answer with the higher confidence will be their “answer in consent”. With the answer from the  $Agts$  and the ground-truth answer  $A_G$ , the softmax loss  $\ell(\cdot)$  in Equation 1 can be calculated.

#### – Parameters Update for $Agts$

In addition to updating the model, which determines whether the proposed questions are informative, the Oracle  $O$  is also responsible for supervising and updating the parameters of the two  $Agts$  for a few iterations. This will prevent two  $Agts$  from converging to a local optimum.

## 3.5. Implementation Details

### 3.5.1 Model Configuration

For the Question Generation Model  $g$ , we follow a similar structure to [38] and substitute GRU into LSTM to better process large-scale data. Moreover, we add a discrete variable to represent the question type and regard it as the first token of the model to improve the diversity of the questions.

To check the grammatical correctness of questions, we apply [30]. In addition, [5] is used to parse the sentence to extract the relevant objects and subjects so that it will check if the target components are present in  $Img$ .

For two  $Agts$  that answer visual questions, we choose two heterogeneous-structured models. The first model is [55], while the second model is [44]. The main difference is that after converting the input into internal representations, the first model iteratively retrieves the related facts, while the second model directly uses the image feature as the first word of the question, subsequently feeding them into the

LSTM. Thus, there is no dynamic iteration. Choosing these models presents a significant variance; however, the only constraint is that they should be different in structure, and we do not regard such VQA models as our contribution. In addition, we test homogeneous-structured models in Section 4 for verification.

### 3.5.2 Training Details

We pre-trained  $g$  and two  $Agts$  for the first 80k iterations as a warm-up. Then,  $Q_g$  generates question proposals  $Q_T$  after filtering out invalid ones and selecting 100 questions based on the initial informative score. Two  $Agts$  output their corresponding answers  $A_t$  and  $\tilde{A}_T$  based on  $Img$  and  $Q_T$ . Once  $A_t$  and  $\tilde{A}_T$  softly converge, it comes to the Supervision Stage while  $O$  asks questions  $Q_G$  from the annotated dataset. The performances of the two  $Agts$  will be the basis for updating their parameters; moreover, they will help to calculate the reward value in Equation 1 and update  $Q_g$ . After rounds of such training,  $Agts$  and  $Q_g$  are trained well for further evaluation.

### 3.5.3 Testing Phase

In the testing phase, we disable the  $Q_g$  for its question generation function. And the answer  $a$  for question  $Q$  and image  $Img$  is given by the following equations.

$$a^j = \underset{\{a_i^j, a_i^j \in Ans, j \in ||Agts||\}}{\operatorname{argmax}} P^j(a_i^j | Img, Q) \quad (2)$$

$$(\mathbb{A}, \mathbb{P}) = \{(a^j, P^j) \mid j \in ||Agts||, Eq. 2\} \quad (3)$$

$$a = \underset{\{a^j, (a^j, P^j) \in (\mathbb{A}, \mathbb{P}), j \in ||Agts||\}}{\operatorname{argmax}} \mathbb{P} \quad (4)$$

Equation 2 and Equation 3 is to predict a set of answer/probability pair  $(a^j, P^j)$  for each  $Agts^j$ , by selecting the one with the highest probability, while Equation 4 aims to choose the final answer from the answer set  $a^j$  of each  $Agts^j$  by its confidence score  $P^j$ .

## 4. Experiments

### 4.1. Dataset

We evaluate our TA-Student VQA system on the VQA-v2 [1] dataset, which includes 82,783 training images. We use 8,000 images and their corresponding Q/A pairs as pre-training data. We evaluate the model on its validation set, which includes 40,504 images.

### 4.2. Models

We use the four following models as our candidate question-answering agents ( $Agts$ ).

**VIS\_CNN** [44], which uses a concept that treats an image as a word and inputs it into the LSTM with questions.

**DMN** [55], which is a neural network architecture that processes input sequences and questions, forms episodic memories, and generates relevant answers with its improved

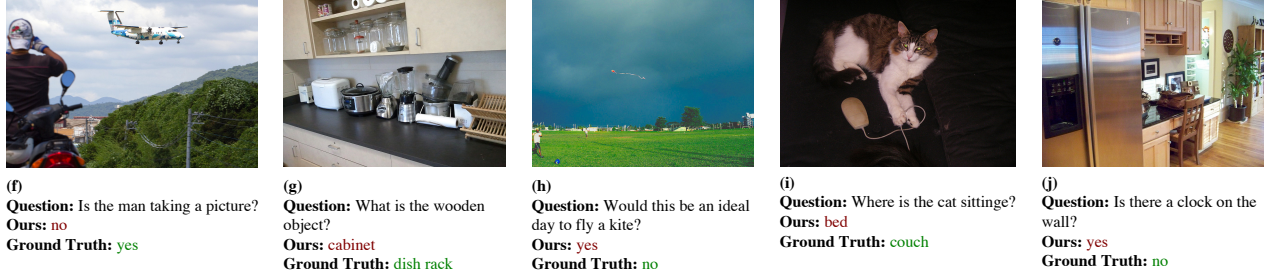
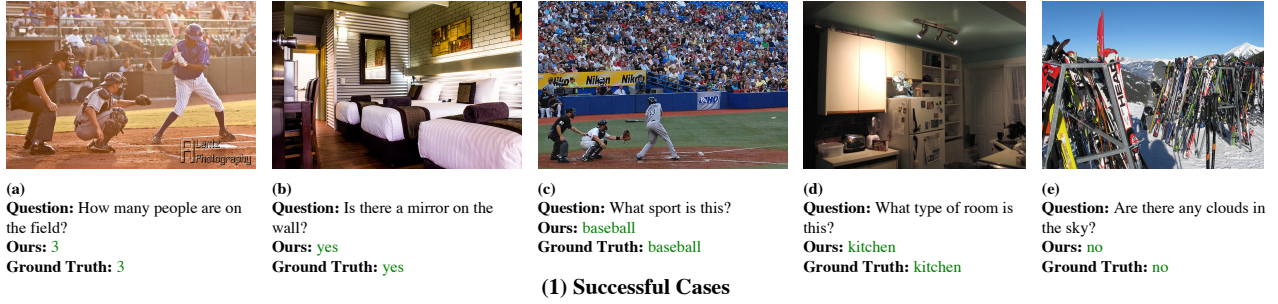


Figure 4: (1) Successful Cases and (2) Failure Cases of Our Model.



Figure 5: Question Proposals per Iteration. With the update in the Question Generating Agent, the question proposals are with increasing sophistication. At first, it asks questions that require simple visual tasks (e.g., object detection), then asks location questions that need to detect scene by objects and their connections; further, it will ask questions that need complex inference.

memory and input modules.

**LSTM-CNN** [31], which encodes images and questions by a CNN and an LSTM, respectively, and then chooses answers from the candidate space with a multi-layer perceptron.

**MCB** [14], which is a method that utilizes MCB to ef-

ficiently and expressively combine visual and textual features.

Unless stated otherwise, we use **VIS-CNN** and **DMN** as our Question-Answering Agents (*Agt*) because they obtain a heterogeneous structure compared with **LSTM-CNN** and **MCB**. The performance comparison between these settings

is given in Section 4.4.1.

### 4.3. Qualitative Results

#### 4.3.1 Successful Results

To obtain more in-depth results on the capability of our TA-Student VQA system, we show several representative examples from different image-question pairs in Figure 4 (1). The results indicate how our model is capable of answering questions that required multiple tasks such as counting, finding objects, and performing direct reasoning (wherein objects are required to infer the scene. e.g., Figure 4 (1) c and Figure 4 (1) d).

#### 4.3.2 Failure Cases

Some examples of our failure cases are shown in Figure 4 (2). Our TA-Student VQA system cannot handle an action without an object being acted upon (e.g., Figure 4 (1) a), as well as cases with objects with highly similar appearances (e.g., Figure 4 (1) g and Figure 4 (2) j). For certain questions that necessitate complicated reasoning due to a lack of information, our system always outputs the answer with the highest correlations of the target objects in the question (e.g., Figure 4 (2) i, "cat" is more related to "bed" rather than to "couch" in the training dataset). Additionally, the model tends to give answers intuitively, rather than perform more in-depth reasoning first (e.g., "kite" is in the middle of the image, and the system prefers to produce an output that is an ideal day to fly a kite.)

#### 4.3.3 Question Complexity

Figure 5 shows the generated questions with further iterations. The format of the questions varies, from "is there" to "what" to "how". Additionally, the complexity and diversity increase, from which the questions start from simply asking object attributes and progress to counting and then reasoning.

### 4.4. Quantitative Results

#### 4.4.1 Overall Performance

	VIS.LSTM <sub>v</sub>	DMN <sub>v</sub>	VIS.LSTM+DMN (Ours)
Acc.	52.77	57.10	62.86
	LSTM.CNN <sub>v</sub>	MCB <sub>v</sub>	LSTM.CNN+MCB (Homo-structured)
Acc.	45.82	46.87	48.14

Table 1: Overall Performance Comparison (%)

Table 1 is our overall result. We compare the performance by using a combination of LSTM.CNN and MCB as the Question-Answering Agents (*Agt*) with VIS.CNN and DMN. For the first combination, there is a 5.06% improvement over the standard method LSTM.CNN<sub>v</sub> (i.e., no self-QA mechanism); however, for the second combination, there is a 10.59% improvement over the standard

Question Type	VIS.LSTM <sub>v</sub>	DMN <sub>v</sub>	VIS.LSTM <sub>sq</sub>	DMN <sub>sq</sub>	Ours
are	19.69	18.70	21.74	21.31	<b>21.79</b>
are there	<b>24.61</b>	11.29	9.00	9.71	10.32
are these	<b>11.60</b>	4.20	7.92	5.38	5.37
are they	18.79	10.43	21.98	20.10	<b>26.71</b>
can you	15.63	10.49	18.10	14.11	<b>21.47</b>
could	10.68	13.33	22.13	24.03	<b>29.38</b>
do you	8.79	12.30	18.14	14.97	<b>20.85</b>
do/does	<b>8.73</b>	4.92	7.13	4.93	5.20
does this	7.78	<b>15.24</b>	8.11	10.26	5.37
has	29.35	16.34	18.34	19.01	<b>29.92</b>
how	8.52	6.50	18.55	16.80	<b>20.00</b>
how many	15.08	5.30	25.09	26.89	<b>27.63</b>
is	31.41	21.86	38.85	37.96	<b>41.71</b>
is obj.	25.71	12.82	25.86	28.98	<b>29.87</b>
was	18.12	7.25	20.02	17.94	<b>20.49</b>
what	17.68	22.23	20.26	37.79	<b>45.22</b>
what color	9.50	13.92	30.05	26.32	<b>31.70</b>
what does	<b>15.33</b>	14.63	15.09	15.16	15.32
what is/are	11.26	5.91	19.51	16.28	<b>22.03</b>
what numb.	5.57	<b>8.50</b>	7.94	7.77	8.13
what obj. is	8.25	11.92	12.24	14.57	<b>15.79</b>
what time	3.54	4.37	<b>4.90</b>	3.29	4.12
what type	18.37	7.51	21.44	18.30	<b>22.67</b>
where	8.39	12.76	30.46	32.16	<b>34.56</b>
which	14.03	17.94	15.85	20.72	<b>20.77</b>
who	14.51	7.80	14.78	10.05	<b>14.92</b>
why	13.84	6.46	19.73	17.56	<b>20.52</b>
others	8.69	5.70	<b>9.58</b>	4.84	5.02
total	14.41	11.09	17.96	17.76	<b>20.60</b>

Table 2: Accuracy per Generated Question in Dataset (%) method VIS.LSTM<sub>v</sub>. This indicates that either combination will improve the result. Furthermore, the more the structure differs, the greater the improvement.

#### 4.4.2 Performance per Annotated Question

Figure 6 demonstrates the accuracy of each question in the annotated dataset. The figure shows that our model is typically effective for questions such as "was/is/are", "could", "have/has", "what" and "who" questions. For questions that need in-depth reasoning (e.g., "how" and "why"), the model obtains the opportunity to improve.

#### 4.4.3 Performance per Generated Question

To validate our question generation model, we evaluate our model on our question proposals. For each category, we test 100 generated questions. We evaluate the results through manual inspection. The results are shown in Table 2. Here, LSTM.CNN<sub>v</sub> and MCB<sub>v</sub> are the standard methods, serving as baselines, with no other mechanism.

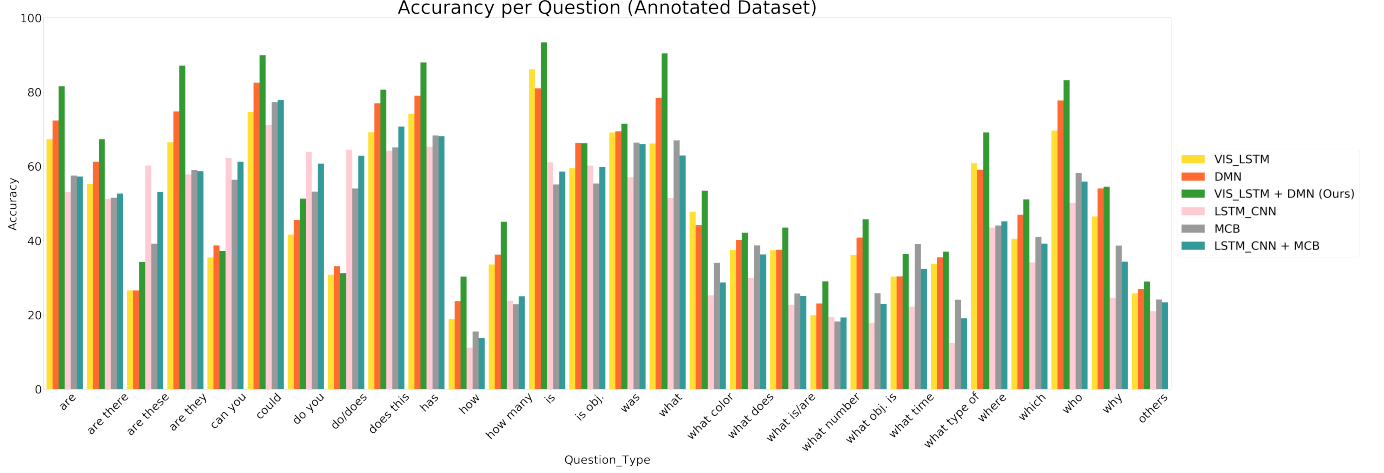


Figure 6: Accuracy per Annotated Question in Dataset

In  $\text{LSTM\_CNN}_{\text{sq}}$  and  $\text{MCB}_{\text{sq}}$ , the self-questioning mechanism is implemented; however, only one question-answering agent (either  $\text{LSTM\_CNN}$  or  $\text{MCB}$ , respectively) is used to obtain the result. Finally, **Ours** is the proposed technique, in which the self-questioning mechanism is implemented and both  $\text{LSTM\_CNN}$  and  $\text{MCB}$  are used as question-answering agents; between the results generated by these two agents, the one with the higher confidence score is chosen as the final result.

The table tells us the following: (1) With a larger capacity, our model is able to address questions through generalization. (2) With such a question proposal mechanism, our model obtains improved reasoning questions (e.g., "how", "where" and "why"). (3) With the collaborative learning between two agents,  $\text{LSTM\_CNN}_{\text{sq}}$  and  $\text{MCB}_{\text{sq}}$ , an overall better performance is obtained compared to the standard method, i.e.,  $\text{LSTM\_CNN}_v$  and  $\text{MCB}_v$ , and the difference between two  $\text{Agts}$ ' total accuracy gets smaller.

#### 4.4.4 Question Generation Strategy

	w/o $Q_g$	w/ $Q_g$ , $\epsilon = 0.1$	w/ $Q_g$ , $\epsilon = 0.4$	w/ $Q_g$ , $\epsilon = 0.7$
<b>VIS.LSTM+DMN (Ours)</b>	58.92	59.14	61.08	62.86

Table 3: Accuracy with Different Question Generation Strategy (%)

To validate the question generation model ( $Q_g$ ), we evaluate it with several different settings, as shown in Table 3. From the last three columns, we observe that when a higher  $\epsilon$  value is used in epsilon-greedy [22], the question proposals will be more diverse, thus improving the overall accuracy.

## 5. Conclusion and Future Work

This paper introduces a self-QA pattern and proposes a system based on this idea. Our TA-Student VQA system

utilizes a TA agent ( $Q_g$ ), which is responsible for generating informative questions, and two student agents ( $\text{Agts}$ ) that answer the proposed questions. The  $O$  model plays the supervision role and updates the previous three models to guarantee that the training phase is efficient. Unlike previous work, our mechanisms overcome the barrier whereby the training Q/A pairs for each image are limited because our system can generate questions diverse formats and content. Additionally, utilizing two question-answering agents ( $\text{Agts}$ ) combines the advantages of the two methods and increases the system capacity. Our results also show that such a self-QA mechanism not only performs better in the annotated dataset but also performed well for questions that are off the distribution of the training data, thereby improving the generalization ability.

The study of this problem is still in its infancy. One issue to be addressed is the number of Question-Answering Agents ( $\text{Agts}$ ). We attempted to use more than two  $\text{Agts}$ , but the time cost of the training phase makes it less competitive than two  $\text{Agts}$  because there are more parameters to update and more computations when attempting to converge three or more parties. This provides clear direction for future work: developing an efficient method to reduce the computation costs and improve the parameter update efficiency. Second, with our Question Generating Agent ( $Q_g$ ), the system achieves improved performance. Thus, another direction for our future work is to develop a system that is not only responsible for generating relevant, diverse, and informative questions but also can produce reliable corresponding answers to achieve self-labeling VQA.

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