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EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF THE PRACTICAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE MODULE USING THE ELICITATION METHOD

Abstract: Due to the wide spread and use of English language throughout the globe, teaching and learning English language has got really surprising importance. This has raised a number of questions related to effective English language teaching. In this scenario, with the help of author's own experience in teaching English language for more than a decade, this article elaborates different factors that are responsible for effective English language teaching. Teacher, methods and techniques, teaching materials and learner themselves are such factors that are responsible for effective English language teaching.

Key words: Practical English, learning, methods.

One of the keys to success when teaching languages is to maximise the opportunities for language production. For ESL students, who speak a different L1 but who live in a country where English is the main language spoken, this can be vital to building confidence and fluency.

Yet those students do not usually start their language learning with zero knowledge of English. Individually and collectively, they have some knowledge of the language, the culture and of the wider world. It's an opportunity for the teacher to use this as a starting point and to build upon that to facilitate learning.

Elicitation techniques are recognised as a powerful way to do this and can be used to ask learners questions that produce L2 speech. This blog post explores these elicitation techniques in further detail, identifies why they are so widely used in ESL settings and provides some practical suggestions for their classroom use.

Remember to also watch our instructional video on this topic below!
(Elicitation, how to get your students to speak more!)

What is elicitation in ESL teaching?

Elicitation is a strategic teaching approach that involves drawing responses, ideas, or information from students rather than the teacher directly providing answers. According to the Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, the word means: ‘Techniques or procedures which a teacher uses to get learners to actively produce speech or writing’,

This is achieved by encouraging learners to reflect on their knowledge, formulate thoughts, and articulate them in the target language. By doing so, students become active participants in the learning process, which can significantly enhance comprehension and retention.

Advocates for the process argue that elicitation is not just suitable for testing knowledge or language production – it can also be used to get students to share their ideas, feelings, motivations and memories. As such, it can be a powerful tool to uncover the real person behind the learner as well as highlighting what learners know or don’t know. Of course, this can be a huge help in lesson planning and lesson management as educators can quickly move on if students have grasped key concepts.

How can elicitation be used in ESL language teaching?

One of the biggest challenges in any language classroom is balancing teacher-centred instruction and student-centred interaction / language production. One of the reasons for the popularity of elicitation techniques is that they can create a bridge between the two approaches. Here’s five key reasons why elicitation should be in every ESL teacher’s toolkit!

- **Stimulates participation:** ESL classrooms thrive on interaction. Elicitation encourages active participation, transforming lessons into dynamic exchanges rather than teacher-led monologues.

• **Builds confidence:** As students successfully respond to elicitation prompts, their confidence in using the English language grows. This gradual confidence boost nurtures a positive learning environment and encourages them to be more adventurous in their communication.

• **Develops understanding:** The process of generating responses helps students deepen their understanding of language structures and usage. By grappling with sentence formation, grammar rules, and vocabulary in practical scenarios, key concepts are learned and retained more effectively.

• **Adaptable to students' abilities:** Elicitation techniques can be tailored to suit learners at various proficiency levels. From beginners to advanced students, the complexity and focus of each prompt can be easily adjusted by the educator.

• **Promotes critical thinking:** Responding to the teacher's prompts encourages students to think critically and apply their language skills to build meaningful responses. This engagement goes beyond rote memorization and empowers learners to grasp complicated language concepts.

Using elicitation techniques in the classroom

There are a wide variety of ways in which ESL teachers can use elicitation techniques to achieve different learning objectives. We've summarised four of the main techniques below and provided a brief suggestion of how they might be effectively used by educators.

1. Concept Elicitation

This approach encourages students to define and explain concepts in their own words. It can therefore be particularly effective for vocabulary and grammar lessons. The teacher begins by presenting an image or by describing a word without revealing it. Encourage students to guess the word based on the description or visual cues. For instance, show a picture of a furry, four-legged animal with a wagging tail and ask students to guess the word "dog."

2. Open-Ended Questions

These prompt students to respond with more than just one-word answers. Students are encouraged to try and express their opinions, thoughts and ideas in a coherent manner. A simple discussion starter would be a great example of this approach. Pose an open-ended question to the class and encourage students to respond and exchange insights via a group discussion. Ask a question like, “What are the advantages of learning a second language?” and allow students to share their thoughts. It’s worth noting that open-ended questions might not be appropriate for all pupils. Lower ability students may not have the language to answer them to their own satisfaction. More guided questioning may be needed.

3. Completion Elicitation

In this instance, the teacher provides fragments of text for students to complete. This technique reinforces sentence structure and context-based understanding. The educator provides a sentence with a missing word or phrase and asks students to complete it using appropriate vocabulary or grammar. For example, present the sentence: “She ____ to the park every Sunday.” Ask students to fill in the blank with a suitable verb. Learning could be scaffolded by providing 4 different alternatives, from which students pick the right answer.

4. Visual Elicitation

This technique uses images, videos, or real-world scenarios to initiate discussions and responses. Such cues are proven routes to stimulate creativity and enhance students’ comprehension. The lesson begins with the teacher showing a series of images depicting a sequence of events. Ask students to describe what’s happening in each image and then use their descriptions to create a cohesive story. For instance, display images of a child finding a treasure map, following the map’s clues, and finally discovering a hidden treasure

Things to think about when using elicitation techniques in the ESL classroom

Acknowledging the above benefits, it’s important to carefully consider how you might actually use such elicitation techniques in your classroom. After all, as the educator you will be responsible for coming up with the prompts to get the

conversation started. That will inevitably involve some work and your best efforts may be met with a stony silence.

Combined with multiple incorrect answers, this might suggest that further clarifying input is required from the teacher. But cultural reasons could also explain students' reluctance to get involved. In some cultures, students are not encouraged to volunteer information or to ask questions, while in others the teacher is seen as the expert provider of knowledge. Students may also be afraid of getting an answer wrong and want to avoid being embarrassed or losing face in front of their peers.

Nominating students to answer questions rather than seeking volunteers can be one strategy to address this. Avoiding questions which have a clear right / wrong answer is another tried and tested approach. Always encourage students rather than correcting their mistakes – confidence-building, not accuracy, is the priority with this approach. And finally, learners can also use the above techniques on each other – for example, during brainstorming activities. This helps to build confidence and group cohesion as well as shifting the focus away from the teacher

By leveraging these techniques, educators can create an engaging and interactive learning environment that encourages language production and empowers students to actively participate in their language learning. These are simple, yet effective ways to get learners to use their core language skills – we hope that you give them a try!

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