Workshop 1

Elicitation in teaching language

Main points in the meeting:

1. What is elicitation?

2. Principles and advantages of elicitation

3. Tools for eliciting

4. Types of questions

5. Cultural considerations

6. Recommendations for using elicitation techniques

1.What is elicitation?

Elicitation is term which describes a range of techniques which enable the teacher to get learners to provide information rather than giving it to them. Commonly, eliciting is used to ask learners to come up with vocabulary and language forms and rules, and to brainstorm a topic at the start of a skills lesson. The definition of the term in the Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, '**Techniques or procedures which a teacher uses to get learners to actively produce speech or writing'**, suggests that there may be wider applications.

2.Principles and advantages of elicitation

Collectively, students have a great deal of knowledge, both of the language and of the real world. This knowledge needs to be activated and used constructively. The teaching of new knowledge is often based on what the learners already know. Questioning assists in self-discovery, which makes information more memorable. Eliciting helps to develop a learner-centered classroom and a stimulating environment while making learning memorable by linking new and old information. Eliciting is not limited to language and global knowledge. The teacher can elicit ideas, feelings,

meanings, situations, associations and memories. For the teacher, eliciting is a powerful diagnostic tool, providing key information about what the learners know or don't know, and therefore a starting point for lesson planning. Eliciting also encourages teachers to be flexible and to move on rather than dwell on information which is already known.

3.Tools for eliciting

Language and ideas cannot be elicited without **some input** from the teacher, and eliciting is certainly not an excuse for not presenting language in a clear context. Students also need **prompts, associations and reminders in order to jog their memories**. Often, the teacher provides **stimulus using visuals or the board**.

When working on the simple present for daily routines, for example, **a picture or drawing** of a house and a clock combined with mime can be used to elicit both the names of household items and common verbs:

T: Six o'clock. Where is she?

S: Bed

T: Yes, she's in bed, sleeping. Seven-thirty, every day?

S: Get up

T: Good, she gets up at seven-thirty. Eight o'clock, every day?

S: Eat. Breakfast

T: Well done. Listen: She has breakfast at eight o'clock

The teacher may also **model new structures or lexis** before it is introduced as the target language:

T: Do you like coffee?

S: Yes (I do).

T: Do you like tea?

S: Yes I do

T: Do you like milk?

S: No (I don't)

T: What's the question? Ask me.

A **situational dialogue, example sentences or a listening/reading text** may provide the context from which the target language is elicited. In this case, the teacher is asking the learners to notice how a particular function is expressed, and eliciting is combined with concept questions. In a text or dialogue about the future:

T: Is he talking about the past, present or future?

S: Future

T: Does he know / is he sure about the future?

S: No

T: Right. It's a prediction. What verb does he use?

S: Will

T: Good. Can you give me an example?

Eliciting ideas and background information also **requires input**. This may come from a teacher's anecdote or story, a text, pictures, or a video, and involves the sharing of knowledge between teacher and learners. Information is often elicited onto a mind-map on the board, but it is important that all the students have a record of collective knowledge, and may find one of the many kinds of graphic organizer useful. Reading lessons often begin with a photo or headline from the text which serves a dual purpose in providing a stimulus for eliciting and a prompt for predicting content. KWL charts are ideal records of what students already Know, what they

Want to know, and what they have Learnt by the end of the lesson, and point to the conclusion that eliciting can take place at any stage of a lesson and often indicates what should happen next.

4.Types of questions

There have been a number of typologies and taxonomies of questions. Bloom's taxonomy identifies six types of questions by which thinking skills may be developed and tested. In the context of language teaching and learning, Bloom himself maintained that "The major purpose in constructing a taxonomy of educational objectives is to facilitate communication..." Classroom questions tend to fall into two broad categories:

A.Display questions. These are designed to elicit learners' prior knowledge and to check comprehension. They often focus on the form or meaning of language structures and items, and the teacher already knows the answer.

What does ..... mean?

When do we use .....?

What comes after .....?

What's the opposite of .....?

Where's the stress in .....?

B.Referential questions. These require the learner to provide information, give an opinion, explain or clarify. They often focus on content rather than language, require 'follow-up' or 'probe' questions, and the answer is not necessarily known by the teacher.

What do you think about .....?

Have you ever....when/where .....?

If you had .....what.....?

What kind of .....?

How do you .....?

The best referential questions are those that are 'divergent' or 'open-ended' in that they are broad, may have multiple answers, and require a higher level of thinking from the learners. **Open-ended questions** are ideal for developing skills such as inferring, predicting, verifying and summarizing, as well as eliciting more language. 'Convergent' or 'closed' questions have more narrowly defined correct answers which can be recalled from memory and require little reflection or originality. Closed questions are common in conventional tests.

5.Cultural considerations

While eliciting clearly contributes to student involvement, it does not always produce the desired or expected results. Questions such as 'Who can tell me something about....?' may be greeted with stony silence. Students are wrongly labelled as lacking knowledge or being too shy when there are often cultural reasons for their reticence. In many cultures, students are not encouraged to volunteer information or ask questions while in others the teacher is seen as the sole provider of knowledge. The problem is reinforced by the fact that many units in course materials begin with open elicitation questions which create the possibility of making grammatical or pronunciation errors and therefore losing face in front of classmates.

In cultures where the group is more important than the individual it is unacceptable to stand out either as a success or as a failure. Even with constant encouragement, it is difficult to break down entrenched attitudes and beliefs, and certain strategies may be required:

- Nominate students rather than waiting for volunteers. The student is then not responsible for being made to stand out from the group.

- Give learners time to prepare an answer. Spontaneity may be ideal, but students will be more confident if they are given a moment to think about or even to write down an answer.

- Ensure that there is no right or wrong answer involved. General questions such as 'What's your favourite colour?' or 'What kind of music do you listen to?' are more likely to produce answers than those requiring specific knowledge.

- Encourage rather than correct. When eliciting language, comments such as 'nearly right' and 'try again' are more constructive than 'no, does anyone else know the right answer?'

- Try not to correct when learners are volunteering background information about a topic confidence-building, not accuracy is important here.

6. Recommendations for using elicitation techniques

- Eliciting is a basic technique and should be used regularly, not only at the beginning of a lesson but whenever it is necessary and appropriate.

- Don't try to 'pull teeth'. Prolonged silence or incorrect answers suggest that input is required from the teacher.

-Don't ask students to repeat incorrect answers, but ask a variety of students to repeat a good answer.

- Acknowledge or give feedback to each answer with gestures or short comments.

- Provide sufficient context or information. Eliciting differs from Socratic questioning in that it is designed to find out what the learners know rather than to lead them to a conclusion which only the teacher knows.

- Learners can elicit from each other, particularly during brainstorming activities. This helps to build confidence and group cohesion as well as shifting the focus away from the teacher.
- At lower levels, grade language in questions and try not to over-paraphrase. More guided questioning is needed. Open-ended questions should be avoided as the learners are unlikely to have the language to answer them to their own satisfaction.

Conclusion

The success of eliciting depends largely on the attitudes of teachers and learners to their respective roles. Ideally it promotes the notion of an exchange of information, helps to break down traditional teacher-centredness, and begins to establish a variety of interaction patterns in the classroom. It is also fundamental to the inductive approach to teaching language and to learning through tasks and self-discovery, and a simple and effective way of getting learners to produce language.

References:

- Eliciting, 2013. Steve Darn, Freelance Trainer, Izmir, Turkey Funda Çetin, Izmir University of Economics (A journal from the https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/eliciting)