

ENHANCING EFL TUTORS' ELICITATION SKILLS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT ZAIN ACADEMY

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Corresponding Author : durrohikmah@unuja.ac.id

Durratul Hikmah^{1*}
durrohikmah@unuja.ac.id
Universitas Nurul Jadid,
Indonesia

Silfiana Jamila²
anajamila244@gmail.com
Universitas Nurul Jadid,
Indonesia

Endang Widiastutik³
endangwidiastutik@gmail.com
Universitas Nurul Jadid,
Indonesia

Iinaton Nafi'ah⁴
iinatonnafiah05@gmail.com
Universitas Nurul Jadid,
Indonesia

Abstract

Zain Academy is a remote training institution characterized by a large and heterogeneous student body. Contrary to initial assumptions of rigid teaching patterns, field observations revealed that the tutors delivered interactive and engaging lessons. However, the partner faced a critical challenge regarding elicitation skills; the tutors were unable to stimulate students to speak English freely, naturally, and in-depth, leading to short and shallow responses. Given the strict one-hour face-to-face geographical constraint, this community service program offered a tactical solution through a collaborative "Curhat & Solusi" (Sharing & Problem Solving) session based on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. The program integrated digital technology via Google Forms-based self-assessments and a four-week remote WhatsApp mentoring scheme. A pre- and post-session self-assessment survey completed by the four participating tutors indicated a marked increase in perceived elicitation confidence, with the cumulative mean score rising from 2.32 to 4.42 on a 5-point scale across the four targeted strategies, with the largest self-reported gains for information gap activities (+2.40) and Wait Time (+2.30). These findings suggest that even a highly compressed, one-hour intervention can meaningfully shift tutors' self-perceived pedagogical confidence, offering a replicable, low-cost model for capacity building in similarly resource-constrained non-formal EFL settings.

Keywords: course tutors, elicitation hacks, experiential learning, speaking engagement

INTRODUCTION

Zain Academy is a prominent non-formal educational institution operating in a remote area at the foot of a mountain with limited urban access. Despite its rural and isolated geographical setting, this academy maintains a remarkably high and heterogeneous student enrolment drawn from various neighbouring sub-districts, which reflects strong community trust and institutional vitality (Suryanto

et al., 2023). The educational delivery is driven by local tutors who exhibit extraordinary commitment, resilience, and professional dedication. Intensive initial field observations and interviews with the management dismissed the initial stereotype that rural learning is inherently rigid, monotonous, or dry; on the contrary, the tutors at Zain Academy displayed highly interactive, energetic, and visually engaging instructional performances.

However, a deep pedagogical diagnostic revealed a critical problem at the micro-pedagogical level: a severe deficiency in the tutors' elicitation capacity. Elicitation, the strategic pedagogical skill of prompting, probing, and drawing out student responses, was underutilized. Consequently, this deficiency directly throttled student output; when prompted in English, students could only deliver extremely short, superficial, and fragmented responses, failing to speak freely, naturally, or profoundly. According to Brown (2015), interactive language pedagogy requires communicative triggers that stimulate student cognitive investment. This issue is highly coherent with Sudjana's (2019) framework, which posits that a lack of varied elicitation stimuli strictly confines students' communicative exploration. Furthermore, the highly heterogeneous nature of the student body demands that tutors possess fluid classroom interactional competence to throw adaptive conversational triggers rather than rigid scripts (Diaz, 2021; Walsh, 2012).

Empirical studies on EFL teacher and tutor training reinforce the centrality of elicitation as a trainable interactional skill. Farahian and Rezaee (2015) demonstrated that EFL teachers' elicitation techniques directly shape the quantity and quality of learner talk, while Walsh (2012) argued that classroom interactional competence, including the strategic use of wait time and follow-up questioning, can be deliberately developed through reflective, practice-based training rather than acquired incidentally. Community service and teacher-training interventions in remote or non-formal settings, such as the reflective teaching practice program documented by Marlina et al. (2023), have typically relied on extended, multi-session face-to-face workshops, a model that is structurally unavailable to Zain Academy given its single-hour access window. At Zain Academy itself, prior institutional support (Suryanto et al., 2023) focused on legal-administrative capacity building for the course's institutional licensing rather than on classroom-level pedagogical skills; to date, no intervention at this partner has specifically targeted tutors' elicitation practices. This program therefore addresses a contextual and practical gap: to the authors' knowledge, it is among the first attempts to design a short, single face-to-face session combined with sustained digital mentoring specifically to build elicitation skills among tutors in a rural, non-formal EFL setting. The four strategies selected for the intervention are grounded in this

literature on elicitation and interaction: Wait Time draws on established findings that extending post-question pause time increases the length and complexity of learner responses; Follow-up Chain operationalizes Walsh's (2012) notion of interactional competence by extending single-turn questions into sustained exchanges; Sentence Starters function as linguistic scaffolds consistent with sociocultural accounts of supported language production; and Information Gap Activities are a long-established technique in communicative language teaching for generating a genuine need to negotiate meaning. Framing these four techniques together as elicitation strategies is thus consistent with the broader pedagogical literature on prompting, probing, and sustaining learner talk.

Compounding the problem, the institution's rural geography restricts the tutors' access to advanced professional development or pedagogical workshops (Nugroho et al., 2021). Most crucially, the community service team faced a severe geographical and structural constraint: face-to-face intervention was strictly limited to a single one-hour session. Traditional, lengthy lecture-based training models are completely ineffective under such time pressure, requiring an immediate behavioural disruption method (Maryati et al., 2025). Leaving this elicitation weakness unaddressed would render the tutors' interactive potential redundant, while the students' target speaking production would remain permanently stifled. Therefore, this community service program deploys the David Kolb-based Experiential Learning framework through a highly compressed, tactical "*Curhat & Solusi*" session. By utilizing visual meta-plan tools and remote digital mentoring, this program aims to fundamentally transform the tutors' elicitation mechanics and drive deeper student speaking engagement from the rural periphery.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Partner's Problem Focus

Zain Academy faces a critical deficiency in its tutors' micro-pedagogical interactive capabilities, specifically regarding advanced elicitation techniques. While the tutors are dedicated and maintain an interactive classroom atmosphere, they lack the strategic capacity to systematically draw out comprehensive spoken responses from their heterogeneous student body. This fundamental vulnerability manifests in three clear priority problems:

1. **Instructional Anxiety and Rushed Assistance:** During the initial structured-sharing reflection (see Method), tutors themselves self-reported that classroom silence provoked instructional anxiety, and that they typically supplied vocabulary or took over the conversation within an estimated two seconds of a student pausing. While this two-second estimate is based on tutors' self-reported recollection rather than timed classroom observation, it was a

- consistent and independently raised theme across all four tutors' sticky-note reflections, indicating a shared perception of insufficient wait time.
2. Dominance of Closed-Ended Queries: Tutors heavily rely on binary or rigid questioning patterns, which inadvertently terminate communicative exploration and result in short, shallow responses.
 3. Temporal and Geographical Constraints: Due to the partner's remote location at the foot of a mountain, face-to-face training was strictly limited to a single one-hour slot, necessitating an immediate behavioural disruption method.

The main objective of this community service focus is to enhance the tutors' elicitation capacity to promote deeper student speaking production.

Proposed Solutions and Target Outcomes

To resolve these prioritized issues within the strict 60-minute constraint, the team deployed a tactical "*Curhat & Solusi*" session structurally grounded in David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle:

1. Visual Meta-plan Problem Mapping: Tutors openly reflected on and clustered their concrete instructional frustrations using sticky notes, making their teaching flaws visually explicit to disrupt their old habits.
2. Injection of Four Tactical Speaking Hacks: The session provided four immediate operational mechanics: Wait Time (enforcing a mandatory 5-second thinking pause), Follow-up Chain (structuring continuous probing questions), Sentence Starters (linguistic scaffolding anchors), and Information Gap Activities (generating a genuine communicative need).
3. Remote Mentoring via WhatsApp: To overcome the geographical barrier, a 4-week digital mentoring scheme was established, requiring tutors to upload 1-minute real-classroom video clips for iterative clinical feedback.

Each solution directly targets one of the three identified problems: Visual Meta-plan Problem Mapping surfaces and validates tutors' own instructional anxieties (Problem 1), the four Tactical Speaking Hacks equip tutors with concrete alternatives to closed-ended, anxiety-driven questioning (Problems 1 and 2), and the compressed single-session format paired with WhatsApp mentoring accommodates the geographical and temporal constraint (Problem 3) by extending support beyond the one-hour window. The targeted outcome of these integrated solutions is measured through tutors' self-assessed elicitation confidence on a 5-point Likert scale across the four indicators corresponding to each strategy, with success defined as an observable increase in the post-session mean relative to the pre-session baseline for each indicator.

METHOD

Implementation Phases and Task Distribution

The tactical solution was structured into three systematic phases, adapting David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle into a compressed 60-minute face-to-face workshop followed by extended digital intervention to systematically disrupt rigid teaching behaviours (Kolb, 2014; Lau & Wong, 2025). Four tutors from Zain Academy participated in the program, comprising the entirety of the institution's active teaching staff at the time of implementation. Two tutors had approximately three years of teaching experience at the academy, while the other two had approximately one year of experience, giving the group a mix of relatively junior and more experienced practitioners. Given this small, whole-population sample, the findings reported in this article are interpreted as an in-depth case description of this specific cohort rather than as generalizable, statistically inferential results. Evaluation was conducted through a single self-assessment instrument administered via Google Forms both immediately before and immediately after the 60-minute session. The instrument consisted of four items, one corresponding to each targeted elicitation strategy (Wait Time, Follow-up Chain, Sentence Starters, and Information Gap Activities), each rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all confident, 5= very confident) reflecting tutors' perceived confidence in applying that strategy. As this instrument captures tutors' self-perceived confidence rather than independently observed classroom performance, the resulting scores are interpreted throughout this article as changes in self-reported pedagogical confidence, not as directly verified changes in actual teaching behaviour.

1. Preparation Phase: Digital coordination was initiated to map the partner's pedagogical shifts. The team developed a digital Pre-Test Self-Assessment via Google Forms to measure the tutors' initial elicitation confidence and prepared visual media, including markers, sticky notes, and meta-plan papers. The classroom layout was rearranged into a collaborative, peer-oriented seating arrangement.
2. Implementation Phase (60-Minute Interactive Session): Grounded in interactive language pedagogy to maximize cognitive engagement (Brown, 2015), this phase was executed across five sequential segments:
 - a) Segment 1: Trigger Story (5 mins): The team leader presented a real-case scenario of short student responses to establish contextual relevance.
 - b) Segment 2: Structured Sharing (15 mins): Tutors individually reflected on their instructional frustrations, previous tricks, and target changes using sticky notes pasted onto meta-plan sheets.

- c) Segment 3: Concrete Strategies (25 mins): The team delivered and unpacked four specific speaking hacks: Wait Time, Follow-up Chain, Sentence Starter, and Information Gap Activity.
 - d) Segment 4: Peer Practice (10 mins): Tutors engaged in a bi-directional role-play as teacher and student to experience the techniques firsthand.
 - e) Segment 5: Action Commitment (5 mins): Tutors locked in one strategy onto the collective "commitment wall" for immediate next-week execution.
3. Follow-up and Evaluation Phase: Tutors completed a digital Post-Test Self-Assessment, transitioning the project into a remote mentoring framework.

The implementation tasks were clearly balanced across the team: the Team Leader (Durratul Hikmah) served as the master facilitator and clinical evaluator; Student 1 (Silfiana Jamlia) managed administrative logistics and physical media; Student 2 (Endang Widiastutik) engineered the digital Google Forms and tabulated assessment data; and Student 3 (Inatun Nafiah) managed the metaplan clustering, multimedia documentation, and WhatsApp monitoring portal.

Partner Participation and Sustainability Evaluation

The partner, Zain Academy, actively driven by its management and local tutors, participated as a collaborative subject rather than a passive recipient. The institution managed the structural logistics, adjusted schedules, mobilized full tutor attendance, and realigned the physical classroom layout to support group dynamics. During the session, the tutors provided raw field data via sticky notes and practiced peer role-playing to internalize the conversational hacks, which is essential to build strong classroom interactional competence (Walsh, 2012).

To support continued practice beyond the geographical and time barriers of the single session, a follow-up mentoring mechanism was deployed post-activity. Tutors participated in a 4-week remote mentoring scheme via a dedicated WhatsApp Group. Each week, tutors were required to submit a 1-minute audio or video snippet showing the real-classroom application of their chosen elicitation "weapon" (e.g., Follow-up Chain or Wait Time). The implementation team reviewed these submissions and provided informal, qualitative feedback and encouragement; this process was not accompanied by a structured observation instrument or independent rating, so it functioned as a supportive coaching channel rather than a source of quantitative behavioural evaluation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The deployment of the 60-minute "*Curhat & Solusi*" session yielded a direct pedagogical shift among the local tutors at Zain Academy. Rather than functioning

as a traditional theoretical lecture, the team acted as collaborative facilitators to directly disrupt the tutors' existing classroom habits.

To evaluate the tutors' self-perceived elicitation confidence before and after the session, the implementation team collected data from all four participating tutors using a pre-test and post-test digital self-assessment instrument administered through Google Forms. This instrument evaluated the tutors' self-efficacy across four primary micro-pedagogical elicitation indicators using a 5-point Likert scale. Given the small, whole-population sample ($n = 4$), the data were analysed descriptively: individual pre-test and post-test scores for each indicator were averaged into a mean per indicator, and the margin of improvement was calculated as the difference between the post-test and pre-test means. No inferential statistical testing was performed, and no independent classroom observation data were collected during the 60-minute session itself; the scores below therefore reflect tutors' self-reported confidence rather than externally verified performance. The aggregated descriptive outcomes and the corresponding margins of improvement are structured systematically in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of tutors' elicitation capability scores

No	Elicitation Competency Indicators	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Margin of Improvement
1	Confidence in maintaining a 5-second <i>Wait Time</i> without interrupting students	2.10	4.40	+2.30
2	Proficiency in constructing continuous probing questions (<i>Follow-up Chain</i>)	2.40	4.60	+2.20
3	Systematic application of <i>Sentence Starters</i> as linguistic scaffolding anchors	3.00	4.50	+1.50
4	Structural design capacity for <i>Information Gap Activities</i> to trigger interaction	1.80	4.20	+2.40
Cumulative Average		2.32	4.42	+2.10

The data in Table 1 indicate a marked increase in tutors' self-reported elicitation confidence across all four indicators. In the field execution, this shift in self-assessment scores was observed following a highly interactive 60-minute session divided into 5 clear chronological segments (Figure 1). In *Segment 1* (Trigger Story), the team leader established emotional relevance by presenting a common field scenario: a tutor asking a student what they did yesterday, only to

receive a rigid, short response of "*I go home*" followed by an anxious silence. This case immediately validated the tutors' main frustration in conversation classes.

Teaching Sequence Framework

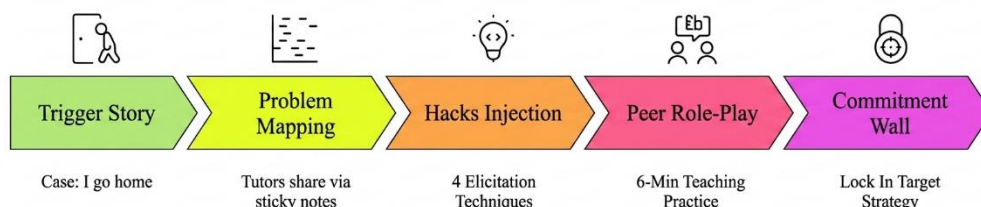


Figure 1. Five segments

In *Segment 2* (Structured Sharing), tutors utilized sticky notes and markers to answer three reflective questions regarding their exact moments of teaching frustration, the tricks they had previously attempted, and their ultimate goals for instructional change. These sticky notes were visually clustered on meta-plan sheets, see Figure 2. The clustered data revealed a major pedagogical flaw: when students went silent for merely two seconds, tutors experienced instructional anxiety and immediately took over the conversation or supplied vocabulary, which inadvertently blocked the students' cognitive process.



Figure 2. Tutors shared their experiences using sticky notes

To resolve this, Segment 3 injected 4 specific "Speaking Hacks": *Wait Time* (holding a 5-second thinking pause), *Follow-up Chain* (chaining open-ended

questions like *"What did you watch?"* or *"Why did you like it?"* instead of saying *"Good"*), *Sentence Starters*, and *Information Gap Activities*. In Segment 4 (Peer Practice), tutors sat in pairs and engaged in a 6-minute bi-directional role-play as teacher and student to experience the psychological impact of these elicitation hacks firsthand (Figure 3). The session concluded with Segment 5 (Action Commitment), where tutors stuck their chosen strategy on the "commitment wall".



Figure 3. Tutors play roles as student and teacher

To support continued practice beyond the single face-to-face session, the project transitioned into a 4-week digital remote mentoring scheme via a WhatsApp Group. Tutors were asked to upload a weekly 1-minute real-classroom audio or video snippet showing the attempted application of their chosen elicitation strategy, and the implementation team responded with informal, qualitative feedback on each submission. This mentoring phase functioned as a self-directed practice and feedback loop rather than a formally scored observation protocol: no structured observation rubric or independent rater was used, so no quantitative behavioural data from this phase are reported here. Consequently, the mentoring scheme is best understood as a support mechanism that reinforced the strategies introduced in the session, rather than as evidence in itself of sustained behavioural change.

Discussion

The largest self-reported gain was in tutors' confidence in designing Information Gap Activities (+2.40), rising from a low pre-session baseline of 1.80. This baseline is plausible given that tutors operating within rural parameters typically have limited access to contemporary communicative task designs

(Nugroho et al., 2021), which may explain why this indicator started lowest and had the most room for perceived improvement. Following the introduction of physical meta-plan tools and visual card-pairing examples in Segment 3, tutors reported feeling considerably more confident in constructing tasks that would generate a genuine communicative need in their classrooms (Kunitz, et.al., 2022); whether this translates into students actually speaking English longer in practice remains to be verified through classroom-level observation, as the present data capture confidence rather than performance.

The second-largest self-reported gain was in confidence applying a 5-second Wait Time (+2.30), which speaks to what tutors described as a psychological rather than purely technical barrier. In the structured-sharing reflection, tutors themselves described a pattern of anxiety-driven interruption, filling classroom silence within an estimated two seconds by supplying vocabulary or switching to another student. This self-described pattern is consistent with Liu's (2025) argument that instructional anxiety often leads language teachers to perceive silence as a pedagogical failure rather than a cognitive processing window; the parallel suggests that the tutors' rushed behaviour may be less a matter of not knowing how to wait and more a matter of tolerating the discomfort of silence, which is a harder habit to shift than a purely technical skill. Whether the increased post-session confidence in applying Wait Time will hold up under real classroom pressure once the anxiety returns is a question this self-assessment data cannot answer, and is precisely why the follow-up mentoring phase and, ideally, future observation-based evaluation are necessary next steps.

The 4-week WhatsApp mentoring scheme was intended to extend and reinforce the strategies introduced in the single face-to-face session, consistent with Walsh's (2012) argument that classroom interactional competence develops through sustained, reflective practice rather than a one-off input. However, because this phase relied on informal review of tutors' self-selected video submissions rather than a structured, independently rated observation protocol, it cannot itself be treated as evidence that classroom interactional competence actually improved over the four weeks; at most, it indicates that tutors remained engaged with the strategies and continued to practise them voluntarily. This is a more modest claim than the behavioural transformation reported in some community service literature. Marlina et al. (2023), for instance, built a culture of peer assessment among urban educators through long-term, intensive face-to-face workshops with formal observation instruments. The present program suggests that a compressed, single-session intervention paired with informal digital mentoring may be a feasible low-cost alternative for geographically constrained settings, but confirming whether it

produces comparable classroom-level outcomes would require the kind of structured observation that this program did not include.

The integration of WhatsApp and Google Forms as remote channels aligns with the broader shift toward digitally mediated professional training documented by San and Aziz (2022) and Islam et al. (2021), suggesting that low-cost, widely available digital tools can help extend the reach of pedagogical training into remote, marginalized populations even when only minimal data infrastructure is available.

Two limitations of this evaluation design should be acknowledged. First, the sample comprised the entirety of Zain Academy's four active tutors; while this offers a complete picture of this specific partner context, it precludes any claim of generalizability to other institutions and does not allow for meaningful statistical inference. Second, all reported gains are based on tutors' self-assessed confidence rather than independently observed classroom behaviour, so the consistent, positive direction of change across all four tutors and all four indicators should be read as a promising indication that the intervention was well received and self-perceived as useful, rather than as proof that elicitation practice in the classroom has measurably changed. Future iterations of this program would benefit from incorporating a simple structured observation checklist, completed either by the mentoring team or through peer observation among tutors, to corroborate these self-assessment findings with more direct behavioural evidence.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this compressed experiential learning intervention was associated with a marked increase in the four participating tutors' self-reported confidence in applying elicitation techniques, replacing anxious, immediate interventions with strategic alternatives, at least at the level of self-perception. The structured session and the follow-up digital remote mentoring loop appear to have supported a growing culture of pedagogical self-awareness among the tutors, which may lay the groundwork for tutors to more effectively provide the cognitive processing space rural students need, though confirming this in actual classroom practice remains an important direction for future work. Moving forward, it is highly recommended that non-formal educational institutions incorporate continuous video-based peer evaluation into their regular operational systems. Furthermore, future community service initiatives should expand this low-cost digital monitoring model to other marginalized learning centres to systematically bridge regional educational inequalities.

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