

# A Reflective Account of Use of Photo Elicitation for Interactive Learning in a Community-Based Medical Education Setting in Rural Central India

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## Abstract

**Background:** Photo elicitation is a participatory learning tool. The process involves the elicitation of thoughts and ideas by introducing photos and videos to a group of people to carry out a group discussion and analysis. It has been used as a teaching-learning method in medical education. This technique was used in a community-based medical education rural setting during one of the social service camps for students.

**Methods:** 100 students participated in the process. Two different photographs related to child development were shared through a social application. The images were at the center of the discussion, initiating and guiding the discussion taking place by stimulating the students' minds and provoking them to think about possible inferences that could be drawn based on those images. Guided interactive discussion was used to explain the concepts related to child development.

**Results:** Students involved in the process, found it to be an interesting and interactive teaching method. The method stimulated their thought processes and enabled free discussion. The concepts became easier to grasp, owing to their active participation, and led to a better understanding.

**Conclusion:** Photo elicitation can be used, with some limitations, as an effective and interactive learning method with a large group in a rural setting as well. Simple social applications that are available, can be used to implement this method. However, the method used must be altered according to one's conditions as the teaching-learning settings and context may vary.

**Keywords:** COMMUNITY-BASED MEDICAL EDUCATION, PHOTO ELICITATION, MEDICAL EDUCATION, REFLECTIVE LEARNING

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## Introduction

Photo elicitation is a qualitative method for research that involves the usage of images and videos to stimulate the minds of the participating group members and to generate ideas. A group of people actively and freely participate, leading to fruitful discussion on the subject. Thus, many opinions and schools of thought are explored. It is not an interview, so structured discussions can take place. Interviews include an interviewer or a panel, along with the candidate being questioned, unlike

discussions in which there is one coordinator, managing and guiding the discussion (1).

Various types of images can be used as visual stimulators for discussions. Textbook images may include diagrams, graphs, and charts. Radiology images may include MRI and CT scans and chest radiographs. Images from journals or from pathology slides may also be used. These may be given in printed form or may be circulated via social media or email. Once the images have been circulated among the concerned groups of people, they are ready to begin a full-fledged discussion. There is a coordinator/teacher, who guides the participants, involves them in the ongoing discussion and is responsible for maintaining a stable and healthy

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environment for the discussion, keeping it on track. Their minds remain inquisitive and open to new ideas, besides analyzing and drawing conclusions. The coordinator has a key role in making observations and drawing conclusions, and has to avoid lecturing and ensure student progress, without forcing the participants down a particular line of thought (2, 3).

It aids research as it is a qualitative method and also works as a tool to enhance medical education. There is room for deeper comprehension and understanding as the thought process is evoked. The advantages are because of group involvement and active participation (1).

### **Methods: What was done?**

Photo elicitation, as explained above, is a participatory learning tool. The process involves elicitation of thoughts and ideas by introducing photos and videos to a group of people to carry out a group discussion and analysis.

Our medical college implements a community-based medical education program in the form of the 'Village Adoption Scheme', for every batch of under-graduate medical students as an experiment in medical education. The objective of the village adoption scheme is to make students understand the distal social determinants of health and create a rural bias among them. A social service camp is held every year, in which, the 1<sup>st</sup> year M.B.B.S students visit the village and stay there for a period of 15 days, understanding the conditions that people live in, the constraints in their lives, apart from their health needs and determinants of health. They gain an insight into their lives, norms, and customs, besides the overall atmosphere of the village (4).

During the camp of the 2017 batch, photo elicitation method was used for enhancing our learning. The camp was conducted in the village of Pavnoor, Wardha district, Maharashtra, with a batch of 100 students.

The coordinator began the discussion by introducing the process to the students. He was going to be the guide, keeping the discussion on the right track, preventing any dead ends, without forcing upon the students, a particular

line of thought.

After becoming familiar with the process, the coordinator, circulated a couple of images among the group by WhatsApp social media application. It was ensured that the images were received by all students. They were oriented to the images and were asked to express their opinions and ideas on the images. The images were at the centre of the discussion, initiating and guiding the discussion by stimulating the minds of the students and provoking them to think about the possible inferences that could be drawn based on those images.

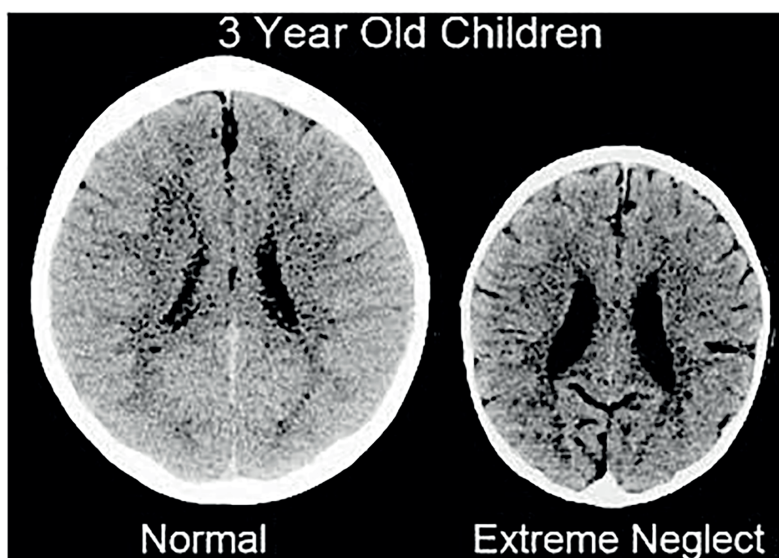
As the students began to share their inferences based on their observations, the activity turned into an interactive discussion since they were enthusiastic about expressing their ideas and making a contribution. A civil and tolerable atmosphere was maintained by the coordinator, who asked the students to be patient, while hearing out others' views. Heated discussions were avoided to maintain a neutral unbiased environment.

### **Tools: What was used?**

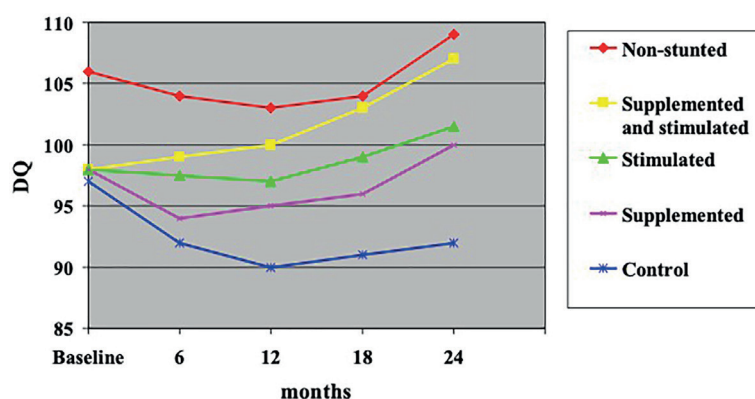
The images included MRI scans of the brains of 3-year-old children (figure 1). One of them was normal and the other scan showed extreme child neglect (5).

From the MRI scan students were able to infer that neglect in the form of lack of age appropriate psychological stimulation or nutrition or trauma or all of the above, leads to reduced brain size and hampers the development of the brain of a child, leading to late milestones in development and growth along with decreased responsiveness and involvement in the job at hand. Analysis and thinking powers are hampered, thus causing slow and faulty judgements. More time and energy must be invested to bring the child at par with the normal child of the same age.

The second photo was a graph comparing the development quotient in five different groups of children (figure 2). Stunted children who received both age-appropriate psychological stimulation and supplementary nutrition, who had received either or neither of these were compared with normal non-stunted children (6).



**Figure 1:** Effects of emotional and sensory deprivation on the brain (5)



**Figure 2:** Randomized Controlled Trial of interventions with stunted children from Jamaica (6)

Students concluded that both adequate nutritional supplementation and age appropriate psychological stimulation was necessary for the development of a child. Deprivation of any of the above factors leads to reduced development quotient. Another interesting observation made by students was that of the two, age-appropriate psychological stimulation lead to better development quotient as compared to only nutritional supplementation.

The discussions in the village brought to light a number of points to focus upon during the village visits e.g. to aid the development of young children give emphasis on age-appropriate psychological stimulation and not just on proper nutrition.

Once the students were finished with the discussion, the coordinator added any significant points that were missed and summarized the

discussion. The coordinator then asked questions and some of the students were asked to review the points discussed, to assess their learning. It was observed that the students were able to explain the underlying concepts that reflected their learning.

### Observations: Reflections Regarding the Process

With respect to the students involved in the process, this method resulted in the stimulation of their thought processes, making it an interactive and interesting session. The concepts became easier to grasp, owing to their active participation, and led to a better understanding.

One of the participants said, *“The group discussion was very interactive, unlike a lecture and very interesting to participate in.”*

Another participant said that, *“This is a*

*productive process as we understood the concepts rapidly and it should be used in our regular classroom lectures too.”*

The process also gave an idea about patience and tolerance to the students as a variety of opinions were expressed, while maintaining a healthy atmosphere for discussion. They learned to respect and tolerate diverse ideas.

## Discussion

Since this process was carried out in a rural setting, technical problems such as slow or suspended internet connectivity relatively hampered the process. As social applications such as WhatsApp were used for sharing, not having a compatible handset to run the application was also a setback.

If the images that are used are not clear or are blurred, it might make it difficult to analyze and draw conclusions. Apart from the technical difficulties, image choice is a very important factor in the study as it guides the discussion and might lead to an entirely different outcome. In our camp setting, photo elicitation was used for the whole batch of 100 students. Some of the students did not participate in the process despite the moderator's efforts. Using photo elicitation with a small group of participants may be preferable as everybody can then actively participate in the discussion and there are no inhibitions about speaking up, to express their ideas. Similar to our experience, photo elicitation has been used as a teaching-learning method in medical education (7, 8).

## Conclusion

Based on the experience, it can be concluded that photo elicitation can be used, with some limitations, as an effective and interactive learning method with a large group in a rural setting as well. Simple social applications that are available, can be used to implement this method. As this method is convenient, efficient, and does not have many technical prerequisites, it was easy to be implemented in the rural setting. It is efficient and interactive, keeping everyone involved and giving them a chance to voice their opinion

and also to think upon the numerous other observations. However, the method used must be altered according to one's conditions as the teaching-learning settings and context may vary.

**Conflict of Interest:** None Declared.

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