

Why We Should Comment on Data - Teaching Activity used in ARTS 140

Objective of the activity:

This activity makes students aware that there are many ways to interpret data. As a result, when they use data in their presentations or writing, they should comment on, or provide their interpretation of, the data; otherwise, their audiences may interpret the data in unintended ways.

Applied linguistics is the content focus for this section of ARTS 140, and this table comes from the textbook that we used for the course. Similar tables could be generated for any topic.

Instructions:

In groups, ask students to discuss the questions and indicate their answers in the table. When they are finished, survey the class (by show of hands) and enter the aggregated data in the table.

Ask each group to consider the data and state the most important point that the data reveals. Groups usually identify very different points.

Examples of what student groups have said:

- Students feel most strongly that the best way to learn a second language (L2) is by reading; that teachers should present simple grammatical information before complex grammatical information; and that L2 errors should be corrected as soon as possible.
- Most students do not feel strongly, one way or the other, about these language-learning statements.
- Although the students in our class are all experienced language learners, they hold very different opinions about how people learn languages best.

Each of these interpretations is valid. Which interpretation do you want your audience to see? If you do not provide interpretation of your data, your audience may interpret the data in unintended ways.

Statement about language learning	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Languages are learned mainly through imitation				
2. Parents usually correct young children when they make grammatical errors.				
3. Highly intelligent people are good language learners.				
4. The most important predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation.				
5. The earlier an L2 is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success.				

6. Most of the mistakes that L2 learners make are due to interference from their L1.				
7. The best way to learn new vocabulary is through reading.				
8. It is essential for learners to pronounce all the individual sounds in the L2.				
9. Once learners know 1000 words and the basic structure of the language, they can easily participate in conversations with native speakers.				
10. Teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practise examples of each one before going on to another.				
11. Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones.				
12. Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.				
13. Teachers should use materials that expose students only to language structures they have already been taught.				
14. When learners are allowed to interact freely, they copy each other's mistakes.				
15. Students learn what they are taught.				
16. Teachers should respond to students' errors by correctly rephrasing what they have said rather than by explicitly pointing out the error.				
17. Students can learn both language and academic content (e.g. science and history) simultaneously in classes where the subject matter is taught in their L2.				
18. Classrooms are good places to learn about language but not for learning how to use a language.				

Reference

Lightbown, P.M. & Spada, N. (2013). *How Languages are Learned* (4th ed., pp. 3-4). Oxford: Oxford University Press.