



**THE USE OF INFORMATION GAP ACTIVITIES IN
TEACHING SPEAKING
(Classroom Action Research at SMK)**

**PEMANFAATAN KEGIATAN *INFORMATION GAP* DALAM
PENGAJARAN BERBICARA
(Penelitian Tindakan Kelas di SMK)**

Andri Defrioka

SMK 1 Padang

Jl. M. Yunus, Lubuk Lintah, Kuranji, Kota Padang, Sumatera Barat 25175
andridefrioka@yahoo.com

Abstract

The purpose of the research was to test to what extend the applying Information Gap Activities could improve the students' speaking ability and how students respond about the use of these activities. Classroom action research procedures (plan, act, observe and reflection) were used to study the process and participants outcomes. The participants of this research were the twelfth year students of Drawing Department A of SMK Negeri 1 Padang consisted of 23 students. One of English teachers took part in the research as collaborator to assist the implementation of information gap activities and to observe the outcomes. The research was conducted in two cycles with four meetings for each. Observer played a role in evaluating, suggesting, and revising the program. Data from the second cycle were presented to show the final outcomes and changes. Data were collected through observation checklist, test, and interview. The result of the research indicated that the implementation of information gap activities can better improve the students' speaking ability. Students' centered class included pair work and group work also contributed to improve the outcomes. Moreover, students were active to interact with their teacher and other students. The students participated at all activities in the class. The students showed the good responses about the use of information gap activities in teaching speaking. Finally, the classroom action research process itself helped students and teacher reflect on their successes and failures in teaching learning process.

Key words: *speaking ability, information gap activities*

Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menguji sejauh mana penerapan *Information Gap Activities* dapat meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa dan bagaimana siswa menanggapi tentang penggunaan kegiatan ini.

Prosedur penelitian tindakan kelas (plan, act, observasi and refleksi) digunakan untuk mempelajari proses dan hasil peserta. Peserta penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas dua Drawing Department A SMK Negeri 1 Padang yang terdiri dari 23 siswa. Salah satu guru bahasa Inggris ikut serta dalam penelitian ini sebagai kolaborator untuk membantu pelaksanaan kegiatan kesenjangan informasi dan untuk mengamati hasilnya. Penelitian dilakukan dalam dua siklus dengan empat pertemuan untuk masing-masing. Pengamat memainkan peran dalam mengevaluasi, menyarankan, dan merevisi program. Data dari siklus kedua dipresentasikan untuk menunjukkan hasil akhir dan perubahan. Data dikumpulkan melalui daftar periksa observasi, tes, dan wawancara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pelaksanaan kegiatan gap informasi dapat lebih meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa. Kelas yang berpusat pada siswa termasuk kerja pasangan dan kerja kelompok juga berkontribusi untuk memperbaiki hasil. Selain itu, siswa aktif untuk berinteraksi dengan guru dan siswa lainnya. Para siswa berpartisipasi dalam semua kegiatan di kelas. Para siswa menunjukkan tanggapan yang baik tentang penggunaan informasi kesenjangan kegiatan dalam mengajar berbicara. Akhirnya, proses penelitian tindakan kelas itu sendiri membantu siswa dan guru merenungkan keberhasilan dan kegagalan mereka dalam proses belajar mengajar.

Kata Kunci: *speaking ability, information gap activities*

A. INTRODUCTION

The speaking ability in English is a priority for EFL students. Students consequently often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English class on the basis of how well they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. People who know a language are referred to as “speaker” of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing, if not most, foreign language students are primarily interested in learning to speak. The ability to communicate in English clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of students at school and success later in their future career. Therefore, it is essential that English teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking.

In the field, the proficiency in English communication of vocational senior high school (SMK) students still create disappointment among the teachers, parents, as well as, the students themselves. The students are structurally competent to produce grammatically correct sentences, but not able to perform a simple communicative task.

Researcher’s observations and interview with some students show that there are some common problems in part of students: First, *Lack of self confidence*. Unlike reading, writing, and listening activities, speaking requires some degree of real time exposure. Students often feel shamed about they are trying to say in English in the classroom: worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face or simple shy of the attention that their speech attracts. Second, *Reluctant to speak*. Even if they are not inhibited, students complain that they can not think anything to say. The

students have no motive to express themselves beyond the guilty feeling that they should be speaking. In short, the students have no reason to speak or interact. Third, *Low participation*. Only a participant can talk at time if he or she is to be heard. Each one will have very little talking time. This problem is compounded by the tendency of some students dominate, while others speak very little or not at all. Fourth, *Mother tongue-use*. In practicing English in the class with the teacher and other students, they tend to use Indonesian language because it is easier, it feels unnatural to speak to another in English.

Some experts in teaching speaking such as Harmer and Lawtie, have clarified why teaching speaking is very important. According to Harmer (1990), the aim of teaching speaking is to train students for communication. Therefore, language activities in speaking class should focus to language use individually. This requires the teacher not only to create a warm and humanistic classroom atmosphere, but also to provide each student to speak. In this case, the teacher creates strategies to improve the students' speaking ability such as by asking students to interact to their peers in pairwork or groupwork activities.

Lawtie (2004) gives some reasons why teachers teach speaking skills in the classroom. *First*, many students equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and, therefore, view learning the language as learning how to speak the language. The success of learning language is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language. Therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the language classroom they may soon get demotivated and lose interest in learning. *Second*, speaking is fundamental to human communication. If the goal of teaching language is to enable students to communicate in English, then speaking skills should be taught and practiced in the language classroom. Since most EFL learners learn the target language in their own culture, practice is available only in the classroom. So, a key factor in EFL language development is the opportunity given to the learners to speak in the language promoting interaction.

Related to the activities to do in teaching speaking, Richard (2002) clarifies the characteristics of communicative activities that must be applied in teaching speaking: *First, A desire to communicate*. In communicative activity, there must be a reason to communicate. When someone asks a question, the person must wish to get some information or some other form result. There must be an information gap or an opinion gap or some reasons to communicate. *Second, a communicative purpose*. When we ask students to describe their bedroom furniture to their partner, we are creating an artificial communicative purpose and making the activity more artificial by asking them to do it in English. We also create artificial information gaps by giving different information to pairs of students so that they can have reason to exchange information. *Third, a focus on language content not language forms*. In real life, we do not ask about our friends's family in order to practice "have got" forms. We ask the question because we are interested in the information. *Fourth, Language used variety*. In normal communication, we do not repeatedly language forms. In fact, we usually try to avoid

repetition. Fifth, *no teacher intervension*. Teacher intervension in the class communicative activities adds to the artificially. Sixth, *no control or simplification of the materials*. In the class, we often use graded or simplified materials as prompts for communicative activities. These will not be available in the real world.

Moreover, Kayi (2007) states that now many linguists and EFL teachers agree that students learn to speak in the foreign language by interacting. EFL teaching is based on real life situations that require communication, which have characteristics as follows:

1. the purpose is to accomplish a task, such as *conveying a telephone message, obtaining information, or expressing an opinion*.
2. the participants must manage uncertainty about what the other person will say.
3. it involves an information gap: each participant has information that the other does not have.
4. negotiation is central: participants may have to clarify their meaning or ask for confirmation of their own understanding.

Harmer (2003) states that there are three basic reasons why it is good idea to give students speaking tasks that provoke them to use all and any language at their command

1. Rehearsal : It means that getting the students to have the free discussion. It gives them a cahnce to rehearsal having discussion outside the class. It is a way for students to get the feel of what communicating in English.
2. Feedback. All speaking tasks applied in the class should provide feedback for both teacher and students. Speaking activities can give the students' confidence and satisfaction. The teacher' guidance can encourage them into further study.
3. Engagement. Good speaking tasks should be highly motivating,. They should make all students involve and participate in the class. The teacher should set up the activities properly. If both of them have been well done, they can give symphatetic and useful feedback and students will get tremendous satisfaction from it.

Related to what activities the EFL teachers do in teaching speaking, some experts such as Nunan and Kayi. Nunan (2003) suggests five principles for teaching. First, be aware of the difference second language and foreign language. Second, give students to practice with fluency and accuracy. Third, provide opportunities for students to talk by using groupwork and pairwork and limit the teacher's talk. Fourth, plan speaking task that involve negotiation of meaning. Fifth, design classroom activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional and interactional speaking.

Moreover, Kayi (2007) suggests the more details activities in teaching speaking. He suggests ten principles of teaching speaking that could be applied by teachers. First, provide maximum opportunity for students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and task, and shared knowledge. Second, try to involve each student in every speaking activity by practicing different ways of students' participation. Third, reduce teacher speaking time while increasing students speaking time. Fourth, indicate positive signs when commenting on a students' response. Fifth, ask eliciting questions in order to

prompt students to speak more. Sixth, provide written feedback. Seventh, do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often. Eighth, circulate around classroom to ensure that students are on the right track and see whether they need help while they work in groups/pairs. Ninth, provide vocabulary before hand that students need in speaking activities. Tenth, diagnose students' problems and provide more opportunities to practice spoken language.

In the light of suggestions for teaching above, English teacher should create a classroom environment where students have real life communication, authentic activities and meaningful tasks that promote oral language.

Then, information gap activities has increasingly achieved popularity in recent years and has been recommended as a way forward in English language teaching. Various influential experts such as Harmer (1991), Carvalho (1997), Raptou (2002), and Kayi (2007) and their definitions for information gap activities are presented as follows.

Harmer (1991) says that information gap means "a gap" between the two (person) in the information they possess, and the conversation helps to close that gap so that both speakers have the same information. Beside Harmer, Carvalho (1997) says that information gap activities are the activities in which one group has half of the information required to complete the task and other group has the other half (or pair of students). The two groups need to exchange information to complete the task.

Moreover, Raptou (2002) says that in information gap activities, one person has certain information that must be shared with others in order to solve problem, gather information or make decisions. This refers to the fact that in real communication people normally communicate in order to get information they do not possess

Kayi (2007) is another figure who contributes to the use of information gap activities in language classroom. He says that information gaps activities are the activities in which students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that the other partner does not have and the partner will share information. They serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information.

Related to how to use information gap activities in teaching speaking, Zhang (2004) proposes some strategies to be applied in teaching.

1. Pair work and group work.

In order to elicit information and opinion from their fellow peers, the learners need to interact among themselves. They should spend most of their time working in pairs or groups, finding out their peer's point of view, transmitting their own conception, exchanging ideas and questing for clues for solutions. Thus, dividing the learners into pairs and groups is an inevitable and important strategy to implement information gap activities. Also by pair work and group work, without the teacher's control, the learners sense a learning atmosphere of collaboration, non-threatening and non-competition. They will display their abilities to their best.

2. Personalization and individualization

Information gap activities collect views not only from others, but also form one's own contribution as well. It is both speakers' conceptions that close the gap

between them. Personalization activities provide the learners opportunities to express their opinions, suggestions to share their life experiences or ideas. Individualization activities allow the learners to act at their own pace, in their own manner and style, and on the topics of their own choice.

3. Interest.

Interest is particularly important for the implementation of information gap activities. To stimulate the learners involvement, interest requires the activities be designed with some essential characteristics such as, those in games, role playing, real-life touching experiencing activities. Making the information gap activities interesting will ensure a high involvement of learners and keeps the motivation on going.

4. Variety

A variety of information gap activities and techniques are always essential in all teaching and learning. They will accommodate varieties of learning style and individuals. Variety also means great many diverse contributions from learners.

5. Investigator and assessor. The teacher will see the feedback of how the learners are performing in the activities, evaluate the appropriateness of the activities they set and adjust their teaching target in relating to the real situations.

B. METHODS

These two cycles of classroom action research was conducted in the class of XII GBA of SMK Negeri 1 Padang. The participants of this research were the twelfth year students of Drawing Department A consisted of 23 students, 22 of them are boys and only a girl. The research was conducted in two cycles with four meetings for each cycle. One of English teachers took part in the research as collaborator to assist the implementation of information gap activities and to observe the outcomes.

The research was conducted in two cycles with four meetings for each. Each cycle consisted of four steps; *planning, acting, observing and reflecting*, as suggested by Kemmis and Taggart (1988). The information gap activities were applied at each meeting with different topic of the lesson. At the first cycle, not all students interacted with the teacher and their classmates. Only some of them were active and participated in the class. After analyzing the activities at the first cycle, the second cycle was continued for further activities, and teaching procedures.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Finding: First Cycle

At the end of first cycle, the post test and semi structured interview were carried out in order to wrap out with the very important input. The students' speaking at pre test and post test 1 were compared to see the development of students' speaking ability.

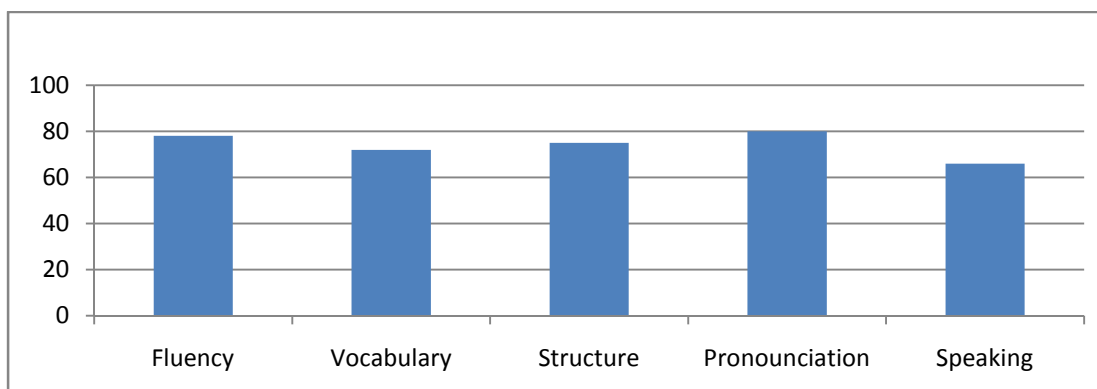


Figure 1: The result of speaking test (Post Test 1))

The result of student speaking scores after conducting the first cycle showed the good development. The average score of students; speaking fluency increased from 71 to 78. Students score at vocabulary also increased from 65 to 72. Presenting the new words through mind mapping gave contribution to this. The average of students' speaking ability increased from 61.30 to 66.30.

The increased of students; speaking ability after conducting the first cycle was also supported by the result of interview which was reported as follows:

1. Students stated that the teacher still spoke fast and the teacher's instructions were not so clear.
2. Students said that they still found difficulties in speaking and interacting since they were lack of vocabularies and found difficulties in pronouncing the words.
3. In practicing in pair work, some students still used Indonesian Language and showed their paper to their friends.
4. The students gave a variety of comments about applying information gap activities in the speaking class. Some students were willing to present and interact and thought that taking part in the pair work and group work activities were a challenge. Students started to take a risk to participate in the activity. In other words, taking a risk was one of the main factors to increase students linguistic competence and students' confidence as well.

After analyzing the students' speaking scores, observing and conducting interview, during the first cycle the students tried to interact to their teacher and other students. The students had reasons to interact and had tasks to fulfill. They understood that if they did not interact, they would not get information. However, the teacher talk still dominated the class interaction such as explaining the lesson, giving instructions, checking students' work etc. The previous problems: lack of self confidence, reluctant to speak, low participation and use of Indonesian language in speaking class were gradually improved.

Moreover, five topics were still identified as the serious problems in applying information gap activities in the first cycle and needed improving on the next cycle such as:

First, the students often spoke in Indonesian Language when they were practicing in pairs or group. Second, one student dominated activities especially in pair work

without giving chances to his friend to ask question. He wanted to fulfill the blanks in his worksheet without giving chances to his partner to ask questions. Third, students could not interact due to lack of vocabularies, not knowing how to pronounce the difficult and new words correctly. They also found difficulties in understanding their friends answer due to mispronouncing of English words. Fourth, some students did not understand how to go through an activity. Teachers' instructions were not clear enough for students. Fifth, some students were simply uninterested in working with others. To do the task, they tend to look at their friends' worksheet without asking questions.

Second Cycle

At the end of the research, the post test was conducted. The researcher and collaborator involved in evaluating their speaking ability.

From five language components tested in the post test 2, there was the clear improvement of students' fluency from 78 to 88. It showed that applying information gap activities gave valuable improvement at student's speaking fluency. The students' mastery of vocabulary also contributed to this improvement. The average students' speaking ability was 70.87.

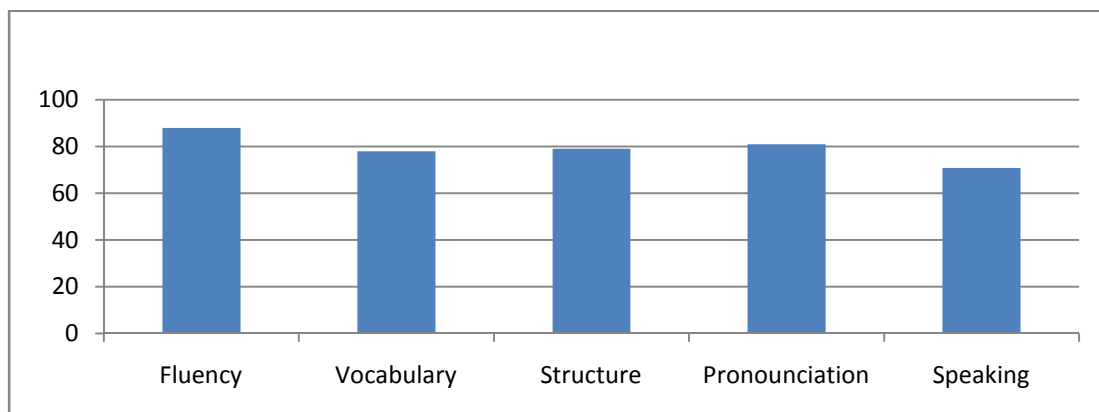


Figure 2: The result of speaking test (Post test 2)

To support the data from observation checklist and speaking test above, the semi structured interview was conducted. The result as follows:

- a. Students stated that the teachers' instruction was very clear.
- b. The students admitted that they liked to interact to the teacher especially if they did not know the meaning of the words. They also said that they answered and responded to the teachers' questions. Then, they added that the teacher responded to the students' questions directly.
- c. The students expressed satisfaction with the certain aspects of student-student interaction in form of pair work and group work such as assessing the other's task,
- d. The students also admitted that they had participated in the class. When the teacher or other students talked, they listened seriously. Moreover, students enjoyed participating in the activity. Working with friends was fun. Students could learn

from each other. The feeling of enjoyment further motivated them and provided a positive attitude toward learning English.

- e. After the implementation of information gap activities, all students agreed that English lesson was enjoyable and they found more chances to speak and interact. Majority of students agreed that they have benefited from the class.

Based on the use of information gap activities and research findings of two cycles, it was found out that information gap activities could better improve the students' speaking ability. The observation checklist, interview result and students' speaking scores expressed the similar data and supported each other.

Based on the figures above, it could be seen that the students speaking ability through the pre test, post test 1 and post test 2 gradually became better. The average of students' speaking fluency showed the best improvement. The mastery of vocabulary also improved from 72 to 78 (6 points). The students pronunciation did not show the improvement only 1 point (80 to 81). The average of students speaking scores increased from 66.30 to 70.87. It indicated that the implementation of information gap activities improved the students' speaking ability.

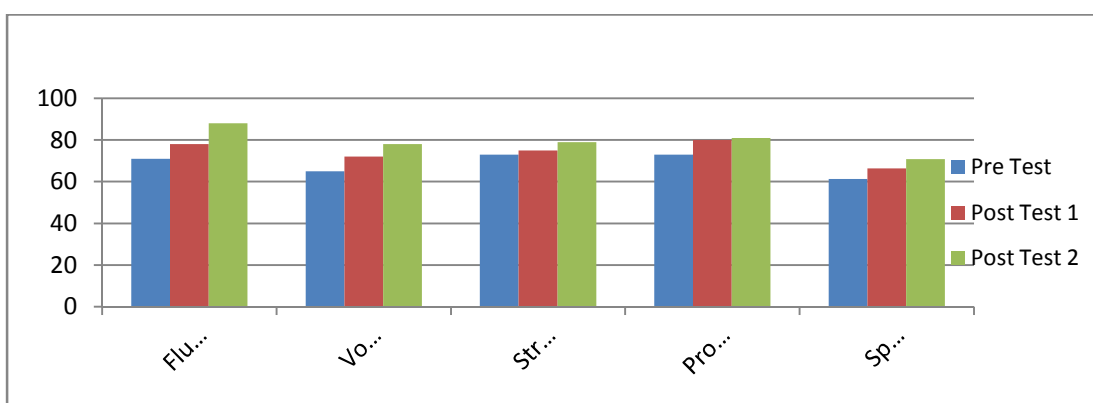


Figure 3: The development of students' speaking ability during two cycles

Observation result showed that the role of the teacher in interactive class was demanding. The teacher was driving force behind the students' activities. Teacher had to create a climate in which the students felt at ease. The class became comfortable and stimulating environment where teacher-students, student-student interaction happened spontaneously and naturally. To do this, the teacher should also provide support by filling in the gaps in knowledge by helping create links with previous learning and supplying the appropriate vocabularies and expressions. At the second cycle, by doing this, it was proved that the students communicated smoothly and practiced a lot as they knew what to do, had enough vocabularies, and had reasons to talk.

While learning, students gradually decreased dependence on the teacher and some of them developed as autonomous learners. They started to reflect on their goals setting tried to reach it through information gap activities. Students were brave enough to interact to both teacher and their friends. This meant that students' confidence in

English class increased. The atmosphere of the class at the time was positive because it tried to give positive feedback to help students.

Information gap activities gave valuable contributions to both students and teacher. In parts of students, these activities had a chance to speak with their partner or classmates because they have to complete the communicative tasks. If a student made mistakes, the other students in the class did not know except his/her partner. By doing this activity, the students were not afraid of getting mistakes anymore, they had high motivation to speak, and they were in the low anxieties or not in the stress condition. The role of teacher was only as the facilitator, providing the language use and giving examples of how to use language expressions. The teacher did not need to talk all the times as he/she did in the traditional teaching ways.

D. CONCLUSION

After using information gap activities in speaking class for eight meetings in two cycles, it could be concluded that Information gap activities can better improve the students' speaking ability. The students' interaction in the class was also improved. When they were practicing in pairs or groups, all students participated. Information gap activities increased students' talking time and minimized teacher talking time. Information gap activities can maximize students' opportunities to speak during English lesson and provided benefits of student-student interaction. In order to elicit information and opinions from the teacher and friends, the students needed to interact among themselves. They should spend most of the speaking class in pairs and group. The students had reasons to speak and tasks to fulfill. Information gap activities encouraged students' practice opportunities of the target language receptivity in the lesson as a result of presenting various tasks. In the light of students' reflections for the tasks used during the research, which were very positive, it showed that students were receptive to the idea of information gap activities while learning English. The students gave good responses toward the implementation of information gap activities.

REFERENCES

- Harmer, J. (2003). *How to teach English*. New York: Longman Inc.
- Lawtie, F. (2004). Teaching speaking skills 2. Overcoming classroom problems
www.Teachingenglish.org.uk/think. Retrieved on March 10, 2014.
- Raptou, V. (2002). Using information gaps activities in the second language classroom.
<http://www.caslt.org>. Retrieved on April 5, 2014.
- Richard, J. C. (2003). Developing classroom speaking activities.
<http://www.professorrichard.com>. Retrieved on April 15, 2014.
- Rivers, W.M. (1987). *Interactive language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shumin, K. (2003). *Factors to consider: Developing adult EFL students speaking activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ur. P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Widdowson, HG. (1994). *Teaching language as communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zhang, L. (2004). What information gaps activities can teach us in TESOL.
<http://linguist.org.cn/doc/su>. Retrieved on July 11, 2014.