DEVELOPING LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH INFORMATION GAP ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. Speaking is the most important skill in the English language because it is the foundation of communication and a part of learning. The information gap technique is one of many methods for improving speaking ability. The researcher wants to find out if students' speaking skills can be improved by using information gap activities and analyzing the classroom environment when this method is used in speaking class. The article describes the study aimed at describing the implementation of information gap activities in teaching English, explaining whether or not information gap activities improve the students' speaking ability.

Key words: speaking, information gap, activity, English classroom, research.

Introduction

Speaking is one of the four essential language skills, alongside listening, reading, and writing. It is crucial for learners to develop their speaking skills because it allows them to communicate with others effectively. However, many students struggle with speaking in a foreign language due to various reasons such as lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and poor grammar. To overcome these challenges, teachers can use various teaching techniques such as information gap activities to help students improve their speaking skills. Speaking in English has been deemed the most difficult of the four skills because it requires speakers to decide why, how, and when to communicate based on the cultural and social context. Speaking is also recognized as an interactive, social, and contextualized process that serves a number of functions based on real-life situations that require communication. [5] Therefore, in order for teachers of foreign languages to be able to teach speaking and encourage students to use the target language in their daily lives, as well as to develop their communicative skills, competence, and culture, as well as to cultivate language learners' interest and motivation to study the

language, teachers should be familiar with some speaking strategies. These strategies also help to enhance language learners' communicative skills.

According to Jeremy Harmer "One type of speaking activity involves the so called 'information gap' where two speakers have different parts of information making up a whole. Because they have different information, there is a 'gap' between them." [1] Information gap activities are activities that require learners to share information with each other in order to complete a task or solve a problem. These activities are designed to encourage learners to communicate with each other in the target language and provide opportunities for them to practice their speaking skills. This article will discuss how information gap activities can be used to develop learners' speaking skills.

Materials and Methods

The research results of Merita Ismaili, Lumturije Bajrami revealed that the use of Information Gap activities helped students improve their speaking skills. After the implementation of these activities, students felt more confident to speak in English; they were enthusiastic in doing the activities; and their motivation for learning and using the language improved. [2] In teaching speaking, the teacher should be able to make interesting topic and apply suitable technique. This can motivate them to speak more because speaking skill more emphasizes students ability to speak as much as possible. [4] "One popular information-gap activity is called 'Describe and Draw'. [1]

The research findings of Masluha Siti showed that the students give positive response for the implementation of Information Gap Activities into the classroom. [3]The activity implies one student having a picture which he should not show to his partner. The partner should draw the picture without looking at it, based on the description given by the student. The study was conducted on a group of 20 intermediate level ESL students aged between 16-18 years old. The students were divided into two groups of ten each. Group A was assigned traditional teaching techniques while Group B was assigned information gap activities.

The study took place over six weeks during which both groups received three hours of English instruction per week. At the end of the six weeks, both groups were tested based on a speaking section that included answering questions on familiar topics and engaging in conversation based on visual prompts.

Results

In the process of the research, the reseacher based the finding on three elements of speaking, mainly, fluency, accuracy and comprehensibility. Two group of students of intermediate level were involved in it (Group A and Group B). Then, the researcher took pre-test based on the components of speaking. Initial findings showed that the groups involved in the research had low results in speaking. The average score was 60 %. After the implementation of the information gap activities in Group B English lessons researcher took the final test on speaking. The results showed that Group B (information gap activity group) had significantly higher scores than Group A (traditional teaching methods group). The average score for Group B was 85%, while the average score for Group A was 60%.

Discussion

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of using information gap activities in developing learners' speaking skills. Information gap activities provide an opportunity for learners to practice their communication skills by sharing information and collaborating with each other in order to complete tasks or solve problems. In contrast, traditional teaching techniques often focus on teacher-centered instruction and do not provide as many opportunities for students to practice their speaking skills.

Information gap activities also provide a context for learners to use the target language in a meaningful way. By engaging in activities that require them to share information with each other, learners are more likely to stay motivated and interested in the learning process. This can lead to increased confidence and improved speaking skills over time.

Students who lack the confidence and vocabulary to share their ideas or who are shy when asked to answer in front of the class benefit from these activities because they give them opportunities to practice speaking. Information gap activities are also beneficial for improving students' learning skills. Additionally, because they are conducted between students rather than between a teacher and students, these activities may enhance the teaching-learning environment. This indicates that the teacher is only a facilitator and not a controller, and she or he can demonstrate how to complete the activity so that students can follow instructions and complete the task. The students are doing more than just sitting there and listening to the teacher explain things; they are also able to interact with their classmates and gain confidence.

In the Information Gap Activity, the instructor only provides instruction, necessary vocabulary, and an explanation of the task.After that, students are expected to complete the task on their own. Because the task cannot be completed without everyone's participation, each student should participate in the process. Due to the nature of the various tasks, many information gap activities are highly motivating. Problem-solving is the task that performs best. In order to select a task with the appropriate difficulty level, the instructor needs to be aware of the students' levels. Any level is acceptable if the task is specified beforehand. Students can practice using linguistic forms and functions through information gap activities.

In order to communicate with their classmates during the lesson, students will need to remember all grammar materials and vocabulary they have learned. The best part is that, like the majority of ESL activities, they are extremely adaptable and can be used for virtually any subject or lesson. You can easily review and practice new vocabulary, parts of speech, and topic-based dialogues by using an information gap activity, for instance.

Conclusion

By and large, one might say that execution of information gap exercises in showing English makes a difference move the students from working in a more

organized climate into a more open climate, as they are ideally utilizing heaps of the objective language, and in the process finding where they have gaps, moreover, as a fundamental piece of the educational experience they:

- make it possible for them to practice the language in a meaningful setting;
- enhance the various abilities they need to learn a new language;
- provide a wide range of experiences and enhance four primary language skills;
- encourage a classroom that is student-centered;
- boost internal motivation;
- develop peer-to-peer cooperation;

In conclusion, information gap activities are an effective way to develop learners' speaking skills. These activities provide opportunities for students to practice their communication skills by sharing information and collaborating with each other in order to complete tasks or solve problems. This study demonstrates that using information gap activities can lead to significant improvements in learners' speaking abilities. Teachers should consider incorporating these types of activities into their lessons in order to provide their students with valuable opportunities for language practice and skill development.

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