

TEACHING EFL SPEAKING USING THE INFORMATION GAP TECHNIQUE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was: (1) to examine whether there could be a significant positive difference between the speaking achievements of students who are taught by using the Information Gap Technique and those who are taught through the traditional method, and (2) to explore the response of students to learning to use the Information Gap Technique in teaching-learning for EFL Speaking. This experimental study was conducted with second grade (year 11) students at SMAN 5 Takengon in the 2016/2017 academic year. There were two classes taken for the sample: one as an experimental group (EG) and the other as the control group (CG). The sample classes were selected by using random sampling. The data was analyzed by using a T-test with SPSS processing for the speaking test and percentages for the questionnaire. The findings showed that the Information Gap Technique was more effective than the traditional method (teacher-centered) for teaching-learning speaking; this was proven by the results from the T-test, in which the findings showed that the T-test from the pre-test of the EG & the CG was 1.3 ($t_{\text{count}} < t_{\text{table}}$) which meant that there was no significant difference between the two scores from both classes. However, the post-test T-score for the EG & the CG was 5.1 ($t_{\text{count}} > t_{\text{table}}$) which indicated that there was a significant difference between the EG & the CG post-test. Also the EG students had a very positive response (95%) to the use of the Information Gap Technique for their teaching-learning of EFL speaking. It can be concluded that the use of the Information-Gap Technique made a positive contribution for the development of the EFL speaking skills of the EG students.

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INTRODUCTION

The National Board of Standards for Education (Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan BSNP, 2006) states that the aim of teaching EFL speaking is to train students to be able to express their ideas meaningfully in real life, in addition to directing students to apply the language in daily communications even outside of school.

During a preliminary study at SMAN 5 Takengon in March, 2015, a teacher and some students were interviewed. They mentioned some problems that happened with the students when learning EFL speaking skills. The minimum passing score for speaking English at senior high school proposed by the BSNP (2006) was 75 however, these students' average score was only 68. Additionally, the English teacher said that his students' first problem is with speaking. So, it could be said that most students at SMA 5 Takengon were not good at English especially at speaking skills. The data obtained from the school (student report books), showed that only 25 percent of the students reached the minimum criteria. The researcher also identified some problems in teaching speaking to the second year students at SMAN 5 Takengon.

Based on the interviews conducted by the writer, some of the problems faced by the students in speaking skills were as follows: 1) Many students do not know how to pronounce some words correctly, and they had difficulties in performing, in speaking in public. 2) The students were often not confident and were shy to use English to say something in front of their classmates; they were reluctant to share their ideas verbally in EFL either with the teacher or with their classmates, and 3) They were afraid of making mistakes and of getting critiqued if they spoke English in public. 4) Lack of practice in speaking. In particular, the teacher tended to ask her students directly to create dialogues in English without giving them enough time to practice together and to participate in the speaking activities. 5) The students lacked motivation to speak in public using English because they were seldom encouraged to be active in EFL conversations. 6) The teacher's strategies were monotonous and she seldom used different strategies.

In accordance with the problems above, the writer proposed that the use of a suitable teaching technique in the classroom could be one way that could overcome some of the problems. One such technique is

the Information Gap technique which is considered as an appropriate technique to encourage the ideas of students by getting missing information from an interlocutor. A number of previous studies have also shown the effectiveness of using the Information Gap Technique for students to teach-learn EFL public speaking

Research Questions

1. Could the Information Gap Technique be more successful than the conventional technique for teaching EFL speaking?
2. What does the response of the students about the use of the Information Gap Technique for teaching EFL speaking to second year students at SMAN 5 Takengon, Central Aceh?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate whether or not the Information Gap Technique could be more successful than the conventional technique for teaching EFL speaking.
2. To find out the response of the students to the use of the Information Gap Technique for teaching EFL speaking to second year students at SMAN 5 Takengon, Central Aceh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Brown (2007) there are five principles that must be known by EFL teachers:

- 1) First of all, the teachers should be aware of the differences between a second language and a foreign language. Learning speaking skills is very challenging for students in a foreign language context, because they have very few opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom. Meanwhile, the second language context is where the target language is an alternative language of communication in the society (such as English in Malaysia or in the Philippines).
- 2) The second principle is the need to give students practice with both fluency and accuracy. Make sure the task given has a linguistic objective, and provide opportunities to help the students to use the foreign language.
- 3) The next principle is providing opportunities for students to talk by using group work or pair work, and **limiting teacher talk (nb)**.

- 4) Then the teacher should plan speaking tasks that involve negotiation for meaning.
- 5) The last principle is the teacher should design classroom activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional and interactional speaking.

Based on the explanations above, it can be inferred that the teacher should apply those principles for teaching speaking in order to make the classroom situation more active and engage students' motivation in learning speaking skills. The Information Gap method is a technique that can fulfill those principles and is considered to be able to solve some of the problems in speaking faced by the second year (Grade 11) students at SMAN 5 Takengon in Central Aceh.

The Information Gap Technique is an innovative technique for teaching-learning EFL speaking which has come up with answers to solve the problems and challenges in the world of teaching EFL speaking and has provided ideas for teachers to take away. The research findings of this study are expected to provide some innovative solutions for solving EFL teaching-learning problems, especially in developing speaking skills at senior high schools.

According to Neu and Reeser (1997) the Information Gap Technique (IGT) can be defined as one of the techniques for EFL teaching-learning in which some students are missing information, but they are asked to complete a task or solve a problem, thus they must communicate with their classmates to get the missing information and fill in the gaps. It is often used in communicative language teaching and task-based EFL language learning.

Chartrand (2007) has stated that the IGT is considered an appropriate technique for teaching-learning communication, through IGT, teachers can create a near-natural situation in the classroom and can get the students involved with the material that they give out as the students will use that material with a friend in a pair activity. He further confirmed that with the IGT, teachers need to clarify the purpose of the activity to their students.

The IGT is implemented in several steps as follows (Neu and Reeser (1997): The teachers have to make sure that the learners know exactly what it is they have to do. The teacher has to go over the directions carefully, and give the students time to ask any questions they may have. The teacher can conduct some activities such as playing a role, exchanging information or describing a picture. Firstly, the teacher asks some students to look at information about a folktale or a

local place. Then these students listen to their partner's questions and use the information they got from the teacher to answer the questions from their partner.

Before the teacher divides the whole class into pairs, she should give as many examples as necessary to make sure that the whole class fully understands the idea of the IGT. The teacher can do a demo or a model of the activity with a learner or two and then let other learners perform the activities until the whole class can begin work on their own. This ensures that the class understands what they have to do and how to do it and the teachers does not have to interrupt them again in order to repeat the instructions again to correct their performance of the technique.

The teacher gives a time limit to build a sense of urgency to the activities, ideally about 15 minutes for each cycle. It is also a good idea to stop an activity after most of the groups have finished so that the whole class is not left waiting for the last couple to finish. Those who are not allowed to completely finish do not lose much since the activity will be spot-checked in some way.

The learners are then asked to sit with their partner from one activity to the next activity using techniques such as numbering off, giving out cards categorized into related topics, separating learners according to the color of their eyes or clothing or the month of their birth, giving them pieces of a puzzle to put together, or even pulling strings held by their classmates to find their partner.

After that, the teacher practices using the IGT in the teaching-learning processes, since this is the most important point of the activities. All the students start their work based on a given topic. Make sure all the students understand the explanations. They have to do their best by working in pairs. In the IGT, the students must help each other to complete the missing information. During this activity, which is the main work, the teacher assesses the EFL speaking performance of each student.

The next step was following up the students' progress. The learners report to the class on either what their pair has discussed or on what their partner told them. It is not necessary that every student reports, but it is important that every learner has the chance to practice speaking EFL with their partner during the activity.

The teacher can extend the activity into a full-class discussion, examine errors that students have made during their group work, or discuss general problems they have had with the exercise. Follow up

and discussion of the IGT activities are necessary so that the learners will feel that they are working purposefully.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used a true experimental study method to get the data about the application of the IGT with second grade (year 11) students at SMAN 5 Takengon, Central Aceh. In this study, an experimental class (EG) and a control class (CG) were chosen at random by the researcher as the sample groups. A pre-test and a post-test were given to both classes. After the pre-test, the writer taught the EG using the IGT and the CG was taught by their usual English teacher using the conventional technique. Finally, the post-test was given to both classes to get the results after the treatment.

The population of this study was all 86 second grade students of SMAN 5 Takengon, Central Aceh. XI Science 1 was chosen as the EG and XI Science 2 was chosen as the CG by random sampling. There were 18 students, 12 girls and 6 boys in the EG and 19, 10 girls and 9 boys in the CG: all their parents were farmers.

Two instruments were used, viz: Tests and a Questionnaire. The tests were adopted from the English Book for second grade students of senior high schools. In evaluating the students' speaking performances, the writer referred to a scale from Harris (1996) which has 5 variables, namely: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehensibility.

The questionnaire was used to see how the EG students responded to the use of the IGT in teaching speaking. It was adapted from one used by ERIC (Education Resources Information Center). There were 10 closed statements in the questionnaire with 4 (four) optional answers, viz: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DS), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The statements were about students' motivation in learning speaking, students' interest in teaching-learning speaking by using the IGT, and the way that the IGT works to help the students in mastering EFL speaking.

The data obtained from the test was analyzed by using the SPSS for the Normality tests, Homogeneity tests, and Independent T-tests for both groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Using the IGT helped improve the EG students' EFL speaking skills. The findings showed that the Information Gap Technique was more effective than the traditional, teacher-centered method, for teaching-learning EFL speaking; this was proven by the result from the t-tests, the t-test of the pre-tests showed that there is no significant difference between the scores of both classes. However, the post-test t-scores showed that there was a significant positive difference in the results for the EG compared to the CG after the treatment.

The results from the questionnaire showed that 85% of the EG students chose strongly agree with the use of the IGT.

Discussions

This research showed that there was a significant difference in EFL speaking ability between the students who were taught using the Information Gap Technique and those who were taught through the Grammar Translation Method. Using pair work and group work were both important features of the IGT in the language classroom. The IGT teaching technique created a positive atmosphere, reducing affective barriers to language learning. Quantitative and qualitative data mutually supported the positive conclusions of the study and pointed out that a relatively substantial amount of improvement had occurred in the five aspects of speaking skills viz: comprehensibility, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary. This finding was supported by Jondeya (2011) who found that the impact of using the IGT for teaching speaking skills was very good.

These findings showed that amongst the five aspects of speaking that were the writer's concern, comprehensibility was the one that showed the most significant improvement. It showed that the improvement of the students from the pre-test to the post-test was 4 points. The second and third most improved were pronunciation and grammar respectively. However, vocabulary and fluency did not show any major change. The students performed better in pronunciation by adapting and correcting their pronunciation during the drilling activities.

In terms of grammar, the students learned many grammatical rules in the process of the interviews. They found the structure of how to ask and answer questions as well as to find the answers to the gaps in their information. In terms of the vocabulary aspect, the students had to read

out their words and sentences in order to find their missing information. This section required the students to learn various vocabulary based on the topic. The students asked each other and helped each other with information about unknown or new vocabulary as well as by getting information from a dictionary and from the teacher. The last aspect was fluency which was also improved a little by the treatment.

Based on the final results from the post-test, comprehensibility showed a higher improvement than the other aspects. This happened because during the teaching-learning, the students focused on finding out information from their partners to comprehend what they needed to ask in order to find the missing information. By learning to speak to get better comprehension, the students were able to communicate more effectively.

In terms of improving the students' ability in EFL speaking, the results from the questionnaire revealed positive responses given by the students. This was in line with Hubbard (1983) who claimed that the Information Gap Technique gave a positive impact to the students' ability in EFL speaking. The results proved that the IGT communicative activities can help students by increasing their motivation and their speaking skills. Additionally, the teacher should also be able to recognize the students' needs and abilities in order to use an appropriate method for teaching-learning EFL speaking.

CONCLUSION

The findings showed a significant improvement in EFL speaking ability when teaching-learning by using the Information Gap Technique compared to the conventional technique for teaching speaking skills to second year students at SMA Negeri 5 Takengon. Using the IGT was also effective for raising motivation to speak EFL in class. The EG students also had a very positive response, 95% to the use of the Information Gap Technique in their speaking classroom.

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