



Using Information Gap Activity in Classroom Interaction to Increase the Students' Speaking Ability

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Abstract

Speaking is one of the language skills that prioritized in education curriculum at junior high school level (SMP) in Indonesia. However, there are still many students who have difficulty in speaking. This is due to the way teachers that teach ineffective and less varied, so that students are less motivated to interact with teacher or with other students in the classroom. Therefore, many techniques have been developed by educational experts to assist teachers in creating effective and efficient ways of learning. One of them is teaching speaking by using "information gap activity". The use of this technique is expected to facilitate and motivate the students in improving their interaction in the classroom and also improve their speaking ability. This technique is used during the experimenting phase to help the students engage in fun conversation. By using this technique, students are expected to be able to speak actively inside or outside the classroom.

Keywords: Speaking, classroom interaction, information gap activity, Junior High School

A. INTRODUCTION

In English learning, the students have to master four skills, namely; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among those four skills, speaking is one of the most important skills since it is the mostly used skill. It is used for example when someone wants to convey messages and exchange information as what Richards (2008: 19) states, that the mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second -language or foreign-language learners. It means that the teacher and the students have to priotize the students ability in speaking in order to make them easier to communicate each other.

Speaking is one element of English skill that has been taught in every school in Indonesia. It is prove that speaking is taught since the students are in the kindergarten up to the university level, especially in junior high school. In junior high school level, the students are expected to be able to express their thought orally. It is mention in the standards of graduate competency stated by Permendiknas number 23 (2006:366),which is stated that "junior high school

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students must be able to express the meaning of interpersonal and transactional discourse orally, formally or informally, within form of recount, narrative, procedure, descriptive, and report. However, it is found that there are still many difficulties in teaching speaking.

There are many definitions related to speaking proposed by experts in language learning. Richards (2008: 24) states that speaking refers to the situations where the point is on what is said or done. The message is the central focus along side with how they interact socially with each other. Thus, another definition says that speaking involves using speech to express meanings to other people (Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams, 2005: 34).

Another definition comes from Thornbury (2005: 08); "Speaking requires the ability to cooperate in organizing the speaking turn. It also normally happens in real time." Thus, he also proposes that speaking consists of three stages: Conceptualization, Formulation, Articulation and also Self-monitoring.

Speaking skill for some students probably is quite difficult to be mastered. This case possibly happened because the activities conducted in the classroom is not attractive for the students. In addition, chances to speak is not given to the students. Mostly, the teacher only explains over and over again rather than giving students opportunity to practice the target language. Therefore, the students are not interested to speak in the classroom and the ultimate goal of learning English cannot be reached. There are some other reasons that make students cannot speak well in English. One of the problem is come from their interlocutors. Like Nunan (1991:47) explain that one of the complications in determining the difficulty of speaking task is the so-called interlocutor effect. The other problem is stated by Harmer (2007: 345) that the class mix, the topic, the organization of the task, and also the reluctant students may become problems in teaching speaking.

To advance the student's speaking ability it is important for both the teacher and the students to build the real communication in the classroom. There are some ways could be applied to make this situation happen. One of the ways is building up the interaction between teacher and the students, or among the students. However, the interaction among the students is more important . As Nunan (1991:51) says that learning to speak in a second or foreign language will be facilitated when learners are actively engaged in attempting to communicate. That is why the teacher needs to create an activity that can build the real interaction among the students in the classroom.

Because interaction in the classroom is important, the teacher has to create a new atmosphere in the classroom. To realize this situation, information gap activity is needed to be applied. According to Watamni and Gholami (2012), information gap is a kind of structured output activities. These are like completing a task by obtaining missing information, conveying telephone message, and expressing an opinion. It sets up practicing specific items of language. It is more like drills than real communication. Information gap activity is one of the communicative learning activity that teachers could use in teaching speaking process because this activity is so simple and it could make students be enjoy in teaching learning process. Moreover, information gap activity is a technique that

teacher can use in the classroom in order to advance the students' interaction in the classroom. As what Defrioka (2009: 39) says that "information-gap activities are communication exercises in which each of two-paired students has information which they must orally relate to each other in order to fill the 'gaps' in the information they have".

In this paper, the problem is limited to using Information gap activity as a way to increase the students' speaking ability in the classroom interaction. This is expected to attract students' attention in speaking class. The formulation of the problem is "How do the English teachers use information gap activity in classroom interaction to teach speaking at junior high school?" The purpose of this paper is to inform the English teachers that "information gap activity" can be applied as an activity in improving students' speaking ability. It is expected that teachers will use "information gap activity" to advance the students speaking ability through interaction in the class room.

B. DISCUSSION

A. Information Gap Activity

Harmer (1998:88) defines information gap activity as a kind of speaking activity where two speaker have different parts of information to be completed. The other defenition comes from Watamni and Gholami (2012) that says information gap is a kind of structured output activities. These are like completing a task by obtaining missing information, conveying telephone message, and expressing an opinion. Therefore, Information gap activity is a kind of activity in the classroom that teacher can use to stimulate the students to speak because along the activity they have to interact each other in order to fulfill the gap of the information they have.

According to Basturkmen (1994), there are three kinds of information gap activity could be done by the teacher. They are partial texts, jigsaw stories, and gap information grid as elaborated bellow:

A. Partial texts

Partial texts is a kind of information gap activity in which the students have to fulfill the missing texts. Students have similar topic that are missing certain details, then they must discuss to create a complete set of information. In this kind of activity, the students can be given the incomplete plans, diagrams, maps, or forms. Each of them can be applied in a certain topic of material. Here are the examples;

- a. Incomplete plans;** this is a kind of partial text in information gap activity which the students are given the same material, but they have to complete the missing information. It can be applied for example in "schedule" material. The students are given the different cards, with the same schedule, then they have to communicate each other to complete the schedule.
- b. Incomplete maps:** This is also a kind of partial text which is the same with the incomplete plans. However, they have the different topic. "Understanding Directions" is one of the suitable topic for the example of this activity. In this kind of activity, student A has Map A, and Student B has Map B. Student A

must direct Student B to locations that are marked on Map A, but not on Map B. Student B must correctly place locations on Map B. Then, reverse.

- c. **Incomplete Diagrams:** is a type of partial text that the student have the task to complete the diagram. One of the suitable example of this activity is under the topic “Practicing Prepositions”. Student A has Diagram A, showing where various characters are located in a building (house, mall, office, school). Student B has Diagram B, showing where other characters are located. Student A must explain to Student B where the people are on Diagram A while Student B draws them there. Reverse roles.
- d. **Incomplete Diagrams:** is a type of partial text that the student have the task to complete the diagram. One of the suitable example of this activity is under the topic “Practicing Prepositions”. Student A has Diagram A, showing where various characters are located in a building (house, mall, office, school). Student B has Diagram B, showing where other characters are located. Student A must explain to Student B where the people are on Diagram A while Student B draws them there. Reverse roles.

B. Jigsaw stories

A jigsaw listening or reading activity is an information gap exercise. Learners hear or read different parts of a text, then exchange information with others in order to complete a task with each student in the pair/group.

C. Gapped information grid

Gapped information grid is one of the types of information gap activity according to Basturkmen. In this activity, the students given out the incomplete material, the teacher requires the students to complete it by asking each other question and/or relating their own information. The example of this activity can be on “Famous people” material

A. The Implementation of Using information gap activity in classroom interaction to develop the students speaking ability

1. Pre-Teaching Activity

Pre-Teaching activity is the beginning phase in teaching and learning process in the classroom interaction. Pre-teaching is also known as the opening activity which gives the students overview about what the lesson looks like. In this phase, teacher starts to use prepared material and media to support teaching process. First, the teacher greets the students or the class to open or to make conversation with the students. Then, the teacher checks the students’ attendance and learning environment. Moreover, the teacher also asks the students’ readiness to study. Next, the teacher motivates the students by telling them the goals or the objectives that the students should achieve at the end of the lesson. Then teacher activates the students’ background knowledge toward the topic that is called by brainstorming. The teacher asks some questions to the students relating to the topic.

2. Whilst-Teaching Activity

a. Observing

In the observing, the students observe the background knowledge that students have about material today, even though the material is taught previously. Firstly, the teacher leads the students to the topic about public places

that will be discussed by showing an example of asking and giving direction. At this time, the teacher displays a video on projector in front of the class. Then, the teacher asks the students to observe the video.

b. Questioning

The purpose of the questioning stage is that the teacher provides an opportunity for the students to ask about what they have seen in observing stage. The teacher has a role to guide them while asking some questions. In this stage, the teacher asks the students about the unfamiliar words, the generic structure or the grammar used in conversation which are found in the video.

c. Associating

In this stage, the teacher draw a map about the public places. It consist of the name of public places, the preposition, and also the location. This map has a function to introduce the material to the students. The teacher may also asks the students to find out more information about the public places from text books, the internet and other sources which are can helped them to understand the topic. After that, asks the students to draw the map on their book.

d. Experimenting

In this stage, the teacher will introduce the students with information gap activity, and tell the students that they are going to use information gap activity. Here are the steps the teacher can follow in using information gap activity in the classroom interaction:

1. The students are given some explanation about Information Gap activity.

In this stage, the teacher introduce the students to an activity. The activity is called "Information gap activity" which is aimed to create a good classroom interaction and develop the stdens speaking ability.

2. The teacher gives example of Information Gap.

In this stage, the teacher show the students the example of the activity. The teacher can point out a students to be the example, then the teacher and that student show the class the activity.

3. The students are divided into pairs.

The teacher ask the students to find their partner because the activity will be in pair. They can choose their own partner, or to shorten the time they also can be paired with their seatmate. The task are divided into two first student will be given task A and the second student will be given task B. (See Apendix 1)

4. The students make conversation with the partner based on the task.

The two students will be asking each other questions to which they don't know the answer. The activity where learners are missing the information they need to complete a task and need to talk to each other to find it.

After all the students have finished, now it is the time for each partner to compare their finding with another partner. The teacher ask the students to sit in two groups. A group consists of the students who have the same role in the previous activity. Then, the teacher ask the students to discuss the answer with their groups.

This means to extend the students interaction in the classroom. Therefore, the students not only interact with the teacher and their partner, but also with their groups and the whole class.

e. Communicating

If all students finish their discussion, it is the time for the students to communicate their finding to others. The teacher asks one volunteer from group A and one from group B to show or to present their finding to their friends and discuss it. They can also ask their friends to give a comment or suggestion. It means to make they interact with another group in order to increase their speaking ability.

3. Post-Teaching Activity

In post-teaching activity, the teacher confirms whether the students understand the lesson or not. Besides, the teacher gives feedback to the students towards the process and learning achievement. It can be like giving a reward to the students who participate in the learning process. The teacher reads out the students who have been the volunteer and give reward such as giving a pen, a candy, or a book. The last, the teacher concludes or summarizes the lesson together with the students.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Speaking is one of the most important skills because every people need to speak when they want to convey messages and exchange information. However, many students still have lack of motivation and speaking time in classroom interaction. This problem caused by several factors such as the activities conducted in the classroom is not attractive for the students, chances to speak is not given to the students, teacher's lack of various techniques of teaching speaking, teacher's lack of use interesting media to teach English and so on.

Based on the discussion in previous chapter, it can be concluded that Learning English skills, especially speaking skill, need the effective technique like the Information Gap Activities in order to make the students enjoy the classroom interaction. It is because information gap activities will encourage the students to speak as fun as possible in order to complete the task that the teacher gave.

Beside, information gap activities also can create the real and smooth communication among the students, teacher and the students, and the whole class. The students could do the interaction smoothly and naturally based on the topic that they have. That is why the classroom interaction will be more interesting, fun, and there is no doubt that it can attract the students to speak and automatically their speaking ability will also increased.

Based on the previous chapter, it is found that the using information gap activity is very useful to advance the students' speaking skill in the classroom interaction. Therefore, for the teacher who wants to apply this activity is hoped to create the interesting topic for the students, and also guide the students first before they got a deep comprehension about the rule of the activities.

The study program of English Department who produce the English teacher are also hoped to produce the best quality of teachers with the deep

understanding about the English Language Learning methods. One of them is using the extended of information gap activities that can help student speak naturally in the classroom.

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