The Use of Information Gap Technique in Improving Students' Speaking Skill

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ABSTRACT
Speaking is an important aspect that enables people to possess good communication skills. Teaching speaking skills to students especially at the high school level is challenging. Nevertheless, the teachers still need a suitable method to teach speaking. The method is expected to facilitate students to apply the knowledge into real life situation. Unfortunately, many students are still having problems with their speaking skills. The student cannot speak English well in the learning process since they are lack of spoken English practice. They are difficult to express their ideas in speaking section as they just memorize the speaking expression from the pattern in the book repeatedly. They are also afraid to answer questions or even talk with their partner in the speaking section. Having this in mind, teachers need to create activities that enable to motivate students in learning process. One of the speaking activities that provide communication competencies is information gap. It is often used in task-based language learning method. In this activity, the student will work in pair to finish a task by asking to their partner about missing information in each other's worksheet. The information gap allows students to collaborate with their classmates for achieving the activity's goal while the teacher assists them. The information gap can involve pair, group, or whole class that can increase varieties in a lesson. Also, students can be more confident as they have essential information to be shared that expected to increase their motivation in the learning process.

Keywords: Information gap, speaking skill

1. INTRODUCTION

To be involved in global communication, everyone needs to learn English especially in this modern era. Realizing the importance of English, Indonesian government decides that English must be taught officially at schools. So, in curriculum 2004 namely KBK, it was stated that English need to be included in the content of the learning process.

One aspect that shows students mastering English is to see their ability to speak in English. In line with this, Grauberg [1] states that the main goal of learning a foreign language is the ability to speak the target language. Therefore, Grauberg concluded that language teachers must help students to achieve the students' goals by releasing all their best abilities. In addition, Bailey and Savage in Murcia [2] states that people have mastered a particular language when they have capability to speak it. Hence, speaking is the most essential skill in a second or foreign language learning activity.

If we look at the education system for English in Indonesia, there are many teachers that still use conventional method like text and dialogue memorization in teaching speaking For example, a teacher will instruct the students to memorize the dialogue from the text book and asks the students to create a short dialogue. This method is only effective for students' pronunciation since they just practice to speak what they memorize from the book and perform it in front of the class by turns. In addition, this method also helps slightly in students' vocabularies since teacher also ask students about difficult word from the book and memorize it repeatedly.

However, as found in the researcher's observation on several schools in Padang, the conventional teaching is also applied by many teachers there. Beside, many students are still having problems with their speaking skills. The students cannot speak English well in the learning process since they are lack of spoken English practice. Therefore, the teachers need to create communicative situations to the students. They should deliver the materials and present adequate chances for students to practice their speaking.

There are some researches related to the use of information gap activity, such as, giving direction, spot the differences and using pictures. Moreover, some researchers propose these activities in language learning. It indicates that information gap is one of the

techniques that make students active and confident in learning, especially in speaking English.

This research aims to discover the information gap application in language learning and to comprehend the effectiveness of information gap in teaching speaking. This research is expected to increase knowledge about information gap in learning process. Researcher also hoped that this research will benefit students, teachers, and writers.

Information gap is an appropriate technique to improve speaking skill. Through information gap, teachers can improve students' speaking skills since it is an interesting technique to be applied in class and it enables students to speak comfortably in the learning process. It is believed that students will be stimulated to speak if teachers can provide them with different information in their speaking task. The information gap also enables students to collaborate with their classmates for achieving the goal of the learning process.

Kathryn [3] explains that Information gap provides practice using newly learned sentence patterns, speaking opportunities, reducing teacher dominance of speech, giving opportunities to interact between students to negotiate, and making target languages understandable. Information gap provides some problem solving activities or gathering information. Each partner has a very essential role since the task cannot be done if the partner cannot deliver information to the other. This activity provides students with enough opportunity to speak intensively into the target language.

Based on the background above, the researcher is occupied to use information gap to improve the speaking skill of students. Speaking activities needs to provide enough time in order to enable students practicing the target language. The activities also ought to motivate the students so that they can occupy on learning process. Information gap activities are able to provide opportunities for students to practice their speaking. They must speak in order to be able to complete their task. Information gap activities can make the learning process more interesting as well. The students are not just keep sitting and listening to the teacher's explanation, but they can take initiative to interact with their classmate and practice collaboratively.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
2.1. Speaking

Speaking is an important aspect to enable people own good communication skills. Speaking is considered as more difficult aspect than writing, reading and listening for most of students who learn English as foreign language as they need to interact with other people in the target language. Hence, they need to practice speaking in real communication to establish their capability in speaking English. The successful of their speaking can be noticed by how they interact well with their interlocutor.

Fulcher [4] defines that speaking is when people use a particular language and they communicate with other by using it. In speaking, it involves two or more people as speakers and hearer to respond to whatever they hear and give their reaction after doing communication. Furthermore, Siahaan [5] states that speaking is a productive skill in a language. It means that speaking is a skill that enables people to produce sounds that contain a particular meaning and be understood by others to generate clear information.

From the explanation above, the researcher concludes that speaking is the process of interaction that can construct meaning. It can involve producing, receiving and processing spoken information where the speaker can express their ideas to other. When we communicate with others, there will be a relationship which is known as communication.

2.2. Information Gap

According to Li [6] states that an information gap is a form of communication between two or more people where the information is known only to several people and they need to exchange it to complete the task. As people usually communicate in order to get information from the others, teachers can apply information gap to avoid the repetition of the same pattern in improving students' speaking skill. By applying information gap, the learners can accustom to share information so that they can complete a task that contains exchanging information from one person to another. Each of students has information that is not owned by another and they need to put together the information for completing the task. Besides, Richards [7] states that the information gap refers to the fact that people will communicate when they need information that they do not possess. Therefore, a task in information gap contains some missing information and splits among the students.

Information gap is a useful technique in which someone is required to express his or her or her thought to the interlocutor orally. They must communicate by using the target language to share the information. This statement is supported by Thornbury [8] as he notes that there is a knowledge gap which can only be connected by using language. So, the students have to apply their speaking skill in target language in order to attain the outcome of information gap task. It is expected to provide enough opportunities for students to speak in the target language for an extended period of time so

that students can increase their speaking skill naturally. In addition, information gap can minimize students' fears by establishing a warm atmosphere in the class and giving opportunity for students to practice with their classmates. As a conclusion, information gap is an activity that requires student to share different information from each other by using the target language in order to complete the missing information in the task.

3. METHOD

Library research was implemented to see the improvement of students' speaking skill in this research. The process in this research involves identifying relevant information, analyzing what the researcher conceived, and developing the thoughts.

Zeid [9] defines that library research is a form of research that enable the researcher to obtain the sources from the library as the main source. In addition, the library research also uses the sources from library to obtain and evaluate the data. The researcher constructs and organizes his ideas to establish the conclusion synthesize. It was also limited on the library research since the researcher does not collect sources from field and the data of the research are acquired from references in library such as some journals and books.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The researcher perceived the application of information gap is a suitable way to solve students' problems in speaking. Raptoe [10] explains that there are several reasons why information gap activities are able to enhance the students' ability in speaking. First, students tend to speak more smoothly in information gap activities since the teacher draws the content and the students have enough time to prepare for the activity by discussing the important vocabularies and expression before sharing the information to their pair. Second, it gives impact to classroom situation which often be dominated by talkative student. Each student gets the chance to speak as the activities in the learning process are distributed well. Third, as students do not get pressure from the task, they will be more joyful in the learning process. Fourth, the teacher can determine the activities of information gap based on the students' level.

The researcher also found that there are some previous studies that proved information gap gives significant impact in teaching speaking. First, Delima [11] found that information gap can help students in increasing their capability in speaking. Her research was focused at finding solutions to problems experienced by almost all students in learning speaking skills, such as lack of self-confidence, limited vocabulary, or often

incorrect pronunciation of words. In this point we know that information gap provides more activities to stimulate students to speak the target language. Besides, it can enhance students' confidence, enrich students' vocabularies, and correct students' pronunciation

Second, Bajrami [12] instructed the students to do information gap activities in form of telling about experiences, making an explanation about a place, or making a description about person in 3 minutes. The result of those activities showed that there is a difference in the mean scores of the two groups. From this study, we conclude that information gap can add variety of lesson and enable students to work collaboratively with their friends to create a good atmosphere in learning process. We can also conclude that this technique is also appropriate not only for Indonesian students but also for foreign country students just like in Bajrani study in Macedonia.

Third, Astuti [13] showed that in her finding there are several improvements in students' speaking skill. Her students are able to gain their confidence and interest in doing activities during the learning process. Therefore, be sides being a good impact for speaking, we may conclude that information gap is also able to enhance students' motivation in learning process. Information gap activities are expected to help student become an active learner so that they can obtain better result in the learning process.

Littlewood [14] explains that there are several steps in applying information gap activities. First, the teacher needs to give clear explanation related to the activity which is going to be conducted. Second, the teacher instructs the students to do the task in pair or group. Third, the teacher distributes worksheets that will be observed by every student in group. Fourth, the teacher helps students to review and pronounce several vocabularies that will be used based on the worksheet. Fifth, the teacher instructs the students to discuss in giving the correct answer based on their own worksheet to the other members in the group without seeing other member's worksheet. Sixth, the teacher asks the students to discuss in order to reconstruct the whole answers in group. Last, the students tell their answer to the whole class.

By applying information gap in learning process, we can achieve some benefits in learning process. First, information gap can stimulate the learners to interact freely with others to gain information from their pair. It can create a casual atmosphere which enables the student feels comfortable to be more active in language learning. Second, this technique can be used for various levels of students such as from the elementary to the advanced level. Third, information gap is not only

effective at the productive grade, but also for the receptive grade in the classroom as well.

Moreover, Harmer [15] defines that information gap is able to increase the purpose of communicative and the interest to communicate with other people. This technique allows students to discuss the meaning as they have to give appropriate answers based on what they understand in order to complete the task. Hence, the students will have need and reason to communicate through the task in information gap activities

As a conclusion, information gap can give significant impact in improving students' speaking skills. The improvement of speaking skill is significance. It can be seen from some studies above that raised the students' achievement of speaking skill. Moreover, information gap is also able to attract students' interest and motivation. Thus, by using information gap as a technique for learning English, the teacher can also increase students' motivation.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on discussion above, the researcher discovers that the information gap is effective to give significant impact in speaking skills. It can be seen from the previous chapter which explained information gap has good result on student's speaking achievement. Thus, the students have enthusiasm in teaching learning process. Then, the students have better self-confident than before. It is because information gap make them enjoy the learning process.

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