

# **Improving the Students' Speaking Skills and the Learning Process of English Speaking through Information Gap at the Grade XI-IS 2 of the Public Senior High School 7 Malang**

**Misianto**

Public Senior High School 7 of Malang

[misianto.misianto@gmail.com](mailto:misianto.misianto@gmail.com)

## **ABSTRACT**

*This Classroom Action Research (CAR) mainly aimed at describing how information gap can improve the students' speaking skills. The data collection was done by using 3 secondary instruments, namely a pre-test, an observation sheet used by the collaborator, and a student questionnaire. Based on the collected data, the information gap proved effective in improving both the students' speaking skills and the learning process of English speaking. The detailed results were as follows: Cycle 1: there were 11 of 14 pairs appropriately using Yes/No-questions (78.6 %) and 2 pairs appropriately using WH-questions (14.3 %). As for the answers, 14 pairs were appropriately giving answers (100 %); 12 pairs with appropriate pronunciation (85.7 %) and 2 pairs with appropriate fluency (14.3 %). To be pertinent to the learning process, all of the 14 pairs showed a state of being enjoyable in speaking English (100 %), 12 pairs showing a state of being enthusiastic (85.7 %), all of the 14 pairs showing their seriousness in speaking English (100 %), and 12 pairs managing to accomplish the tasks of speaking English in the given time. In the Cycle 2: all of the 12 pairs appropriately used Yes/No-questions (100 %) and 11 pairs appropriately using WH-questions (91.7 %). As for the answers, all of the pairs were appropriately giving answers (100 %), 10 pairs with appropriate pronunciation (83.3 %), and 11 pairs with appropriate fluency (91.7 %).*

**Keywords:** *CAR, Information Gap and Speaking Skills*

Richards and Rodgers (1986:67) state that the essence of learning a language based on the communicative approach is learning how to use the language for communication. The final goal of learning a language is communication skills

(communicative competence), meaning that the learner is able to use the language actively as a means of communication in both spoken and written ways to satisfy their needs.

To identify the problems faced by the students when they spoke English a pre-test was conducted. The pre-test was in the form of an interview involving a dialogue in English between the researcher and the students. The topic of the interview was the students' interest in English. The interview required each student to freely answer five questions prepared by the researcher. Based on the interview some problems were encountered by the students. The problems were pertinent to the usage of ungrammatical *WH-* and *Yes/No* questions. Most of the students found it difficult to use the *WH-* and *Yes/No* questions grammatically. They spoke English by using the Indonesian structure which seemed to be dominantly interfering. To solve the problems, the researcher used the information gap for the following reasons.

Information gap has advantages as follows: (1) including almost all communicative elements such as reciprocity, a clear objective, being contextual and interactive. The students can choose their own partners so that they can interact and communicate in a pleasant atmosphere and in the normal time limit; (2) using various forms of questions, get information, make requests, ask for clarification, and express something in their own words to finish the tasks. These activities encourage the students to have the skills of communicating and improvising since the interaction takes place in a normal and natural atmosphere; and (3) being interactive because it is very close to real communication. This activity requires the students to be able to encounter a really spontaneous and

unpredictable communication by giving immediate and authentic responses, not the responses that have been prepared and memorized (Weir, 1990:78). Besides, the information gap involves a skill of negotiating and sharing information to complete a task (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:76) and mutually requesting for information (Byrne (1978) in the Richards and Rodgers (1986:76)). In addition, Brown (2001:185) states that the information gap activities are intended to convey or request for information. The activities have two main characteristics: (a) focusing on information and not on linguistic forms and (b) communicative interactions needed to get information. The types of information sought by the students can be from very simple to the complex ones. Based on the types, then the information gap is grouped into three levels as follows: (1) beginning level involving some tasks such as seeking information of birthdays, addresses, favorite foods and completing the chart; (2) intermediate level involving the tasks of gathering information of the various types of work such as the necessary requirements, the time needed to prepare for a job, the cost of preparation, special requirements, and the amount of salary; and (3) advanced level with its tasks such as conducting small-group discussions to identify the author's messages.

There are several previous studies on improving speaking skills by using information gap such as *the use of information gap technique to improve speaking skill* by Rahimi (2016), *improving students' speaking skill through information gap at the twelfth grader students of the vocational school in Pontianak* by Sijinjak (2015), and *improving speaking skill using information gap to the second year students in SMAN 1 Tangen* by Nurhasanah. All of the studies showed the same result that information gap was effective to improve the students' speaking

skills. The present study is different from the previous ones in terms of the use of a crossword puzzle as a media for implementing information gap in the learning process of English speaking, and is still relevant to be conducted because information gap proves effective to improve the students' speaking skills.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This study mainly aimed at describing how information gap can improve the students' speaking skills.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design used in this study is a Classroom Action Research (CAR) because it is appropriate for solving practical problems found in the learning process in the classroom and conducted in a natural situation (Suhardjono, 2006:62). The practical problems faced by the students when they spoke English were identified in the pre-test, namely the usage of ungrammatical *WH-* and *Yes/No* questions.

There are two steps in conducting CAR, namely preliminary study and implementation (Mistar, 2006) and the following explanations describe those two steps.

The preliminary study included the following activities: (a) identifying the problems encountered by the students when they performed their speaking English. The identification of the problem was carried out through a pre-test in the form of an interview in English; (b) analyzing the problems which were related to

the use of questions and answers in English; and (c) the selection of the problems to be solved with information gap.

The CAR was implemented in the cycles to solve the really practical problems identified in the pre-test. Each of the cycles consisted of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. For the problems were not resolved yet, the next cycle was required to revise the learning strategy.

### **Planning**

In the planning stage the researcher prepared several things needed to implement information gap in order to solve the problems that were already identified. The preparation that the researcher did are as follows: presenting and explaining; designing; and determining, and they are described in the following discussion.

The preparation done in the planning stage included the following: (1) presenting and explaining the materials pertinent to information gap; (2) designing a procedure of using information gap for teaching speaking. The procedure was as follows: (a) the teacher put the students into groups; each group comprised two students (so-called A and B); (b) each group was given a crossword puzzle which was different from one another; (c) the teacher assigned one group to do an interview to complete a cross word puzzle provided by the teacher within 15 minutes in front of the class; and (d) during the interview, the teacher assessed the performance of the student A and B; and (3) determining the criteria of success of information gap based on the aspects of the speaking performance in the interview and the atmosphere of the learning process using information gap. There were

five criteria of success of the speaking performance involving the following aspects to score: (a) the use of Y/N questions was grammatical; (b) the use of WH-questions was grammatical; (c) the use of answers was grammatical; (d) the pronunciation was correct; and (e) the fluency was good. Those five criteria of success were accessed by the researcher using an assessment rubric (Table 1).

**Table 1 Assessment Rubric Used by the Researcher**

NO	ASPECTS TO SCORE	SCORE			
		1	2	3	4
1	The students grammatically use Y/N questions.				
2	The students grammatically use WH-questions.				
3	The students grammatically use the answers.				
4	The students correctly pronounce the words.				
5	The students speak fluently.				

Score Code:

1 = Poor (1%-25%)

2 = Fairly (26%-50%)

3 = Good (51%-75%)

4 = Very Good (76%-100%)

The students' speaking performance was good when the number of students who got score at least 3 was  $\geq 75\%$  of the total students. There were four criteria of success of the atmosphere of learning process using information gap based on the following indicators: (a) the students were interested in doing the tasks; (b) the students enthusiastically did the tasks; (c) the students

seriously accomplished the tasks; and (d) the students accomplished the tasks in the given time.

Those four criteria of success were accessed by the collaborator using the guideline of observation provided by the researcher (Table 2).

**Table 2 Guideline of Observation Used by the Collaborator**

NO	POINTS TO SCORE	SCORE			
		1	2	3	4
1	the students are interested in doing the tasks.				
2	the students enthusiastically do the tasks.				
3	the students seriously accomplish the tasks.				
4	the students accomplish the tasks in the given time.				

Score Code:

1 = Poor (1%-25%)

2 = Fairly (26%-50%)

3 = Good (51%-75%)

4 = Very Good (76%-100%)

The four criteria of success was fulfilled when the number of students who got score at least 3 was  $\geq 75\%$  of the total students.

### **Implementation**

The information gap strategy was implemented in the classroom based on the schedule set by the school. The teacher followed the schedule and kept the atmosphere of learning process so natural that the students did not think that they were being used as the research subject. This stage spent 3 meetings, each of which took 90 minutes. In meeting 1, the teacher gave the students some theoretical concepts of crossword puzzle, information gap, and Yes/No and WH-

questions, and then the teacher assigned the students to practice a dialogue by using the information gap strategy for completing a crossword puzzle provided by the teacher. In meeting 2 and 3, the students were assigned to complete two other crossword puzzles by using information gap. During the teaching-learning process, the teacher acted as a facilitator to whom the students consulted their problems. The strategy was implemented based on the following steps: (a) the teacher put the students into groups; each group comprised two students (so-called A and B); (b) each group was given a crossword puzzle which was different from one another; (c) the teacher assigned one group to do an interview to complete a cross word puzzle provided by the teacher within 15 minutes in front of the class; and (d) during the interview, the teacher assessed the performance of the student A and B.

### **Observation**

This stage was used to collect the data using instruments. This study used two types of instruments, namely the researcher himself (primary instrument) and the guideline of observation used by the collaborator (secondary instrument).

The researcher became the main instrument for observing the overall implementation of the information gap strategy in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. In this study, the researcher monitored the implementation of the strategy. There were two main aspects used for observing the effects of the implementation of the information gap strategy, namely the students' performance of interview and the atmosphere of the learning process using the information gap strategy.

The other instrument of data collection was the guideline of observation. This instrument was used by the collaborator for observing the atmosphere of the learning process using the information gap strategy.

### **Reflection**

At this stage all of the data were analyzed. The data in the forms of the scores of speaking performance were assessed by the researcher by using the assessment rubric and the scores of the atmosphere of learning process were assessed by the collaborator by using the observation guideline. The analysis was done by comparing the scores of speaking performance and the atmosphere of learning process with the criteria of success that were set up by the researcher. The students' speaking performance was good when the number of students who got score at least 3 was  $\geq 75\%$  of the total students and so did the atmosphere of learning process.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

#### **Cycle 1**

Based on the observation done by the collaborator, the students' performance of speaking English was as follows: (a) there were 11 of 14 pairs grammatically using Yes/No-questions (78.6 %); (b) 2 pairs grammatically using WH-questions (14.3 %); (c) 14 pairs grammatically giving answers (100 %); (d) 12 pairs with correct pronunciation (85.7 %); and (e) 2 pairs with good fluency (14.3 %). Based on the results, it seems obvious that the information gap strategy

is able to improve the performance of students' speaking English in terms of the use of Yes/No questions, answers and pronunciations, but the strategy has not succeeded in improving the students' performance on the aspects of the use of WH-questions and fluency. Those two problems were improved in Cycle 2.

To be pertinent to the atmosphere of learning process using the information gap strategy, which was observed by the collaborator, it showed that the result are as follows: (a) all of the 14 pairs showed a state of being enjoyable in speaking English (100 %); (b) 12 pairs showing a state of being enthusiastic (85.7 %); (c) all of the 14 pairs showing their seriousness in speaking English (100 %); and (d) 12 pairs managing to accomplish the tasks of speaking English in the given time. From the results, it seems clear that the information gap strategy is able to create a conducive and fun atmosphere of teaching and learning of speaking class.

## **Cycle 2**

Based on the results of the implementation of information gap on the performance of the students' speaking English in Cycle 1, Cycle 2 was conducted only to improve the students' performance on the aspects of the use of WH-questions and the fluency.

To implement Cycle 2, some revisions of the plan were done by giving more explanation on the use of the WH-questions and doing more practices of how to use the WH-questions in a conversation for the sake of fluency.

Based on the observation done by the collaborator and comparing it with Cycle 1, the students' performance of speaking English got improved. The results

were as follows: (a) there were 12 of 12 pairs grammatically using Yes/No-questions (100 %); (b) 11 pairs grammatically using WH-questions (91.7 %); (c) 12 pairs grammatically giving answers (100 %); (d) 10 pairs with good pronunciation (83.3 %); and (e) 11 pairs with good fluency (91.7 %).

The results of the implementation of information gap on the performance of the students' speaking English in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 are summarized in the following table (Table 3).

**Table 3 Results of the Implementation of Information Gap in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2**

NO	ASPECTS TO SCORE	PERCENTAGE	
		CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2
1	The students grammatically use Y/N questions.	78.6 %	100 %
2	The students grammatically use WH-questions.	14.3 %	91.7 %
3	The students grammatically use the answers.	100 %	100 %
4	The students correctly pronounce the words.	85.7 %	83.3 %
5	The students speak fluently.	14.3 %	91.7 %

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the implementation of information gap, there were some improvement of both the students' English-speaking performance and the learning process of speaking class.

The students' English-speaking performance met the criteria of success, namely the grammatical use of Y/N and WH-questions, answers, pronunciation of

the words, and fluency. This was gained because the strategy stimulated the students to freely speak up expressing any of their ideas in a real dialogue for completing their task, namely filling up a crossword puzzle.

The information gap strategy also gave a positive impact to the learning atmosphere in the classroom where the students learnt happily, enthusiastically, seriously, and managed to accomplish the tasks promptly. The strategy made use of the media of a crossword puzzle which gave the students a challenge to finish the task. The media also provided them with some excitement and curiosity to complete the puzzle.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusions**

This study succeeded in developing a model of learning by implementing the information gap strategy to improve the students' English-speaking performance. The model involved the following scenario: (1) the teacher made a group of 2 seatmates; (2) each group was given a crossword puzzle which was different from one another; (3) simultaneously all of the group members did interviews to complete the puzzles in 45 minutes (1 lesson hour) in their seats; and (4) during the interview session, the teacher assessed the students' performance.

The information gap strategy was advantageous for giving the students the chance of being directly involved in the activities of oral English communication. Based on the analysis of these results, the information gap strategy whose procedure was appropriately followed and proved effective in improving the students' English-speaking performance. Moreover, the strategy managed to

improve the quality of the process of learning English; the students were more enthusiastically motivated to speak English and be better English learners.

### **Suggestions**

The suggestions are addressed to the following two sides: (1) the other researchers doing a follow-up Classroom Action Research with the same topic by fully involving the collaborators in all of the research process to get more significant results; and (2) the English teachers implementing the information gap strategy for improving the students' English-speaking performance and the quality of the process of speaking class.

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