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**IMPROVING THE SPEAKING ABILITY OF THE SECOND  
YEAR STUDENTS OF MTS AL-MUHAJIRIN TAPUNG BY  
USING INFORMATION GAP ACTIVITIES**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This action research is aimed at improving the speaking ability of MTS Al-Muhajirin Tapung by using information gap activities. In other words, it is intended to solve some of educational problems especially in speaking skill. This research consisted of two cycles, before the researcher go to the first cycle. First, the researcher started the activity by giving students the pre-test. It was done to know the general ability of students in speaking before conducting information gap activities. Second, the researcher conducted the teaching of speaking by using information gap activities and giving post test I after treatments in first cycle ( 2 meetings ) The last, because of the score did not achieve the Minimum Criteria of Achievement, the researcher conducted to the second cycle to the students by using information gap activities and giving post test 2 after treatments in second cycle( 2 meetings ). Finally, the result of this research showed that the speaking ability of the second year students of MTS Al-Muhajirin Tapung increased from mediocre level to good level. The last, the researcher concluded that by using information gap activities, teacher can apply it to make students enjoy and interest in learning English especially in speaking class. So it can be a kind solution for the teachers to use information gap activities in the classroom.

***Keyword: information gap activities, improving, speaking ability***

**INTRODUCTION**

Speaking is one of the four language skills that should be learned by students. It is very important to master speaking well by using oral English in communication as often as possible. The more students use English, the better their English will be. If students always use English to share their feelings, opinions and ideas, they will speak English well and fluently.

Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols. Speaking is a crucial part of foreign language learning and teaching. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve the students' communicative skills so that they can express themselves and learn how to use the language.

Teachers should prepare the students to be able to speak in English in the real world outside the classroom and the testing room. One of the skills in English is speaking. Based on the 2004 English Curriculum (CBC), the purposes of teaching speaking are focus on how to build students language skills. The purposes are; first, to enable students in expressing personal identities, hobbies, family background, etc. second, to enable students in describing things, people, places, and sequences or events orally. third, to enable students in expressing ideas, opinions and feelings simply. fourth, to tell about a planning simply. In teaching English, English teachers should be creative in developing their teaching learning process to create good atmosphere, improve the students speaking skill, give attention to the speaking components', and make the English lesson more exiting. English teacher should apply appropriate methods and techniques of teaching speaking. Information gap is one technique that can use by the teacher for teaching speaking.

It is important to give the students a variety of speaking techniques so that they will be able to cope with different situations in reality. Variety also helps keep motivation high. There are some techniques that can improve speaking ability such as task based learning technique, expository, inquiry, jigsaw, problem solving etc. One excellent way to make speaking tasks communicative is to use information-gap activities, in which the students have different information and they need to obtain information from each other in order to finish a task. Information gap is a useful activity in which one person has information that the other lacks. Another advantage of information gap activities is that students are forced to negotiate meaning because they must make what they are saying comprehensible to others in order to accomplish the task (Neu&Reeser, 1997: 128)

An information gap is a situation where one person knows something, which the other does not. This cultivates curiosity/inquisitiveness, inventive nature, confidence, problem solving, phrasing questions, discovering questions, and above all communication. In information gap activity, one person has certain information that must be shared with others in order to solve a problem, gather information or make decisions (Neu & Reeser, 1997). These types of activities are extremely effective in the EFL classroom. They give every student the opportunity to speak in the target language for an extended period of time and students naturally produce more speech than they would otherwise. In addition, speaking with peers is less intimidating than presenting in front of the entire class and being evaluated. Another advantage of information gap activities is that students are forced to negotiate meaning because they must make what they are saying comprehensible to others in order to accomplish the task (Neu & Reeser, 1997).

Information gap is important because it can require free responses, creates interest and challenges learners to think independently. Information gap activities not only encourage communication but develop confidence in the learners. Moreover, it being a part of a text course can be completed within the syllabus framework and the stipulated curriculum. The teacher can also frame questions of such kind for her tests and evaluation. Projects and other activities can be assessed to make them more meaningful and purposeful. Moreover, these activities add variety to the classroom teaching and are more close to the learner's environment. A concept takes the form of concrete representation, rather than remaining an abstract form. This adds to the meaning of the activity and becomes self-motivating. The learners learn to see the theory part from a different angle. It is more interesting and stimulating.

Information gap activities are useful for various reasons. They provide an opportunity for extended speaking practice, they represent real communication, motivation can be high, and they require sub-skills such as clarifying meaning and re-phrasing. There are loads of benefits to using information gap activities in English Language Teaching. The main one being that it forces students to communicate in "real" English in order to complete the task. Also, the component can be motivating and fun for many students. With unstructured info gap, the students are able to practice their existing English knowledge. Information gap activities give student opportunities to use English appropriately inside and outside the classroom. This can be satisfying as they can see the end result of putting all their English together. And create communicative classroom we can easily reduce teacher invention, we can use authentic materials, we can encourage a wider variety of language use and we can create more natural communicative purpose.

For genuine communication to occur in the language classroom, teacher-student ( and student-student) exchanges must go beyond display questions and should be based on the gap that occurs between interlocutors when one does not know in advance what the other is going to say ( Prabhu 1987). Teachers must thoughtfully prepare so that oral interaction involves a transfer of information from one person to another.

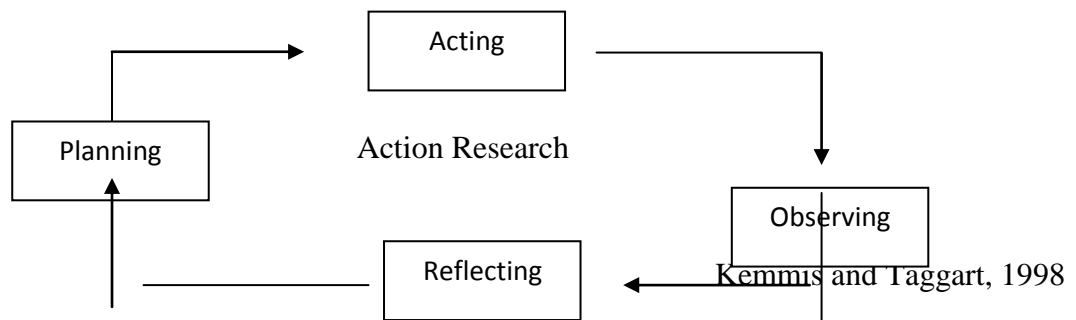
Teachers should begin by using appropriate questioning and conversational strategies, particularly, by asking referential question ( that is, questions they do not know the answer to). Most display questions can be avoided by reformulating the question.

There are two designing of information gap activity. Some can be very structured, with the students using specific vocabulary and grammar to communicate information. Others can be totally unstructured with students free to draw on all or any knowledge they have of English. Structured info gap activities are easy to apply to almost any situation. Unstructured is best used with students who already have an intermediate level of English.

## **METHODOLOGY**

An action research consists of one group pre-test and post-test design. Action research is a cycle of posing questions, gathering data, reflection, and deciding on a course of action (Ferrance: 2000 ). The writer choose one class as where the students one given pretest before treatment and posttest after treatment. This research design is drawn as follows:

These four activities were mentioned one cycle:



It means that a teacher can apply certain treatment in order to give improvement to the students. When there was no improvement after giving the treatment, the teacher can give more treatment until the teacher sees a good improvement of the students.

Action research began when there was a real problem that occurs in teaching and learning process. The problem came from teachers and students, teaching material, teaching media, students' achievement, and the environment (Arikunto, 2009:22). These problems affect on the quality, process, and result of teaching and learning practice. And there was a need to solve the problem immediately. The problem solving was an action that will be applied in teaching and learning process with collaboration with teachers and students as the object of the research. Improvement in teaching and learning was as the expected result.

Before starting the procedure, the pre test was given to the students before cycle 1 in order to know the speaking ability of the second year students of MTs Al-Muhajirin Tapung. The procedure was applied in this research consist of three steps. The steps of implementing the approach were drawn as follows:

### 1. Pre teaching

- Greeting and warming up

### 2. While teaching

- Explain about the meaning of information gap activities
- Prepare papers about recount texts with some information missing.
- Divides the students in pairs (Student A and Student B).
- Teacher allots student A with the name of the writer of the text missing, while Learner B has the same text with the address of the writer of the text missing.
- Together they can complete the text by asking each other question.

### 3. Post teaching

- Gives feedback by asking students some questions about the text.
- Give the students grade for their performances.

During the teaching process, the observer observed the students' and teacher's activities using observation sheet. Both researcher and observer analyzed the activity in cycle 1 through the observation sheets. The observer gave comments about the teacher's performance and added any other improvement in applying an information gap as a media to improve the students' speaking ability in the classroom. After conducting two meetings in the first cycle, the researcher gave post test 1 to the students in order to know the improvement of the students' speaking ability. They were exactly same as in the pre test. To analyze the data, the writer used a formula from (Hatch and Farhady, 1982)

The researcher decided to continue to the cycle 2 because the result of the quantitative and qualitative data in the cycle 1 did not show a significant improvement yet. The researcher revised some activities for the next cycle to make it works better. The researcher still applied an information gap as a media in teaching speaking as previous. The researcher tried to get the students involved in teaching process actively more.

The last stage in a cycle was a reflection. In this session, the researcher and collaborator analyzed the changed which happened with the students in the class and the teacher after all of the action in the research. They discussed about its causes, the process and to what extent using information gap as a media could improve students' speaking ability. The reflection is based on the test given in the end of the teaching and learning process and observations done during the lessons. But, if the problem of the students cannot be solved the research will be continued to the next cycle. Based on the analyzing data, the researcher also could find the weakness of the previous cycle and she could make some revision for the next cycle in order to make it success.

The specific objective of this research is to find out the effect of using information gap activities to improve the speaking ability of the second year students of MTS Al-Muhajirin Tapung. The location of this research is at MTS Al-Muhajirin Tapung. It was conducted from May 2012, in the academic year 2011/2012. The population of this research is the second year students of MTS Al-Muhajirin Tapung, they are about 26 students in the class VIII A. The population is homogenous where the students have same characteristics. It means that the students have the same materials and they are in the same class level (second year).

The purpose of this research is to improve the students' ability in speaking by using information gap activities. a set of test is given to get their scores. This is a kind of pre-test and post-test in which the students needed to perform in front of the class to tell about their experiences.

After grading and commenting the recount text that was made by the students, the next step was to find out the total score of the aspects of speaking. The writer used the formula to get the total score of students below:

$$\text{Score} = \text{V} + \text{G} + \text{F} + \text{P}$$

Where: S = Students' scores

V=students' ability in Vocabulary

G=Students' ability in Grammar

F = Students' ability in Fluency

P = Students' ability in Pronunciation

Three raters helped this research, raters got the total score of each student from the above formula, and then writer collected score from each rater. The next step was to know the real score of the students by using the formula below:

$$RS = \frac{TS}{n} \times 100\%$$

Where: RS = Real score of each individual

TS = Total score of the aspect of speaking

$$RS : RATER 1 + RATER 2 + RATER 3$$

Where: RS = Rater Scores

To find out the students' range and classification, the writer use the table follows:

#### Interpretation of the students' scores in terms of the level of ability

NO	TEST SCORE	LEVEL OF ABILITY
1	81-100	Very Good
2	61-80	Good
3	41-60	Mediocre
4	21-40	Poor
5	0-20	Very Poor

(Harris, 1969 : 134 in Syarifah, 2001:11)

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed it to find out the speaking ability of the second year students of MTS Al-Muhajirin Tapung by using information gap activities. Before the treatments are given to the research respondents, it was already given the pre-test to know the basic knowledge of the students in speaking.

Based on the pre-test , post-test 1 and post-test 2 result, the ability of the second year students of MTS Al-Muhajirin Tapung in speaking can be classified into four categories as presented in the following table:

#### STUDENTS' LEVEL IN SPEAKING

Test	Poor	Mediocre	Good	Very good	Mean scores	Average ability level
Pre-test	15.4%	84.6%	0%	0%	45,6	<i>Mediocre</i>
Post test 1	0%	84.6%	15.4%	0%	57,07	<i>Mediocre</i>
Post-test 2	0%	26.9%	61.5%	11.5%	68,7	<i>Good</i>

From the table above shows that there were 15.4% students in Poor Level in speaking in the pre- test, but at the post- test cycle I the percentage reduce it become 0% and at the post- test cycle I and cycle II. At the third level, Mediocre, the percentage improve significantly from the first test. Furthermore, at the pre-test the percentages was 84.6% and in post test cycle I was also 84.6% and the last in post- test cycle II was 26.9%. Next the fourth level, Good, the percentage of students' ability level in pre-test was about 0%, then at the post-test I the percentage of students' ability level was about 15.4%, and at the post-test II was 61.5%. the last level is Very good there were no students could achieved in this level in the pre-test and post-test I, but in the post-test II the percentage directly increase to 11.5%. So, the writer conclude that the ability of second year students in MTS Al-Muhajirin Tapung has been increased in post test I, the average score was 45.6 and increase to 68.7 in post test 2 and high from Criteria Minimum Achievement from that school.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the result of the data analysis, the researcher draws conclusions as in the following:

1. The students' average scores in post-test 1 was 57.07. it can be said that the students' speaking ability was still under the criteria of successful on minimum standard of achievement (KKM).
2. After treatment in second cycle by using information gap activities to improve students' speaking ability, the students' average scores in post-test 2 was 68.7. it can be concluded the result of research in cycle 2 was successful because it was over than the minimum criteria of successful action or KKM (65).
3. The students' activities during the learning process was not passive anymore. They were more active than before. They discuss about the missing information in their pairs and they enjoyed the activities.
4. It was proven that the using of information gap activities can increase the students' speaking ability. This can be proven that in the second cycle, the average score of the post-test 2 is higher than the score of the successful criteria which is determined by 65.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

After concluding the result of the research, the writer would like to give some suggestions; first, the teacher should be creative to choose the suitable material for the students. Second, teacher should recognize what the students' need in teaching and learning process. Not only what the teachers' want but also how to make the students enjoy and comfortable in teaching and learning process. On the other hand, the teacher should create the class is enjoyable without pressure. Therefore, it is better for the teacher to use information gap activities in teaching English especially to improve students' speaking ability. And the last, using information gap activities in speaking is one of the activities to make the students more active in the classroom and enjoy in teaching learning process.

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