APPLYING INFORMATION-GAP ACTIVITIES TO AN EFL SPEAKING CLASS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' SPEAKING PARTICIPATION - AN ACTION RESEARCH ON 1ST YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS AT HAIPHONG UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to improve the speaking participation and performance of the students in class English Major 5 – K17 (EM 5 – K17) - Foreign Language Department (FLD) - Hai Phong University (HPU) by using information gap activities.

The research was divided into two cycles: Cycle 1 included four meetings and Cycle 2 included two meetings. The data were quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative data were obtained through classroom observations and interviews with the teachers and the students. The quantitative data were obtained from observation checklists and tests (the pre-test, the progress test, and the post-test). The actions implemented in this research were described as information gap activities which included implementing classroom English in the teaching learning process, improving students' vocabulary, retelling a story in front of the class, and rewarding students or groups who gave the best performance.

The result of the research showed that the implementation of information gap activities could improve the students' speaking participation and performance.

Key words: Information Gap activities, Speaking participation, Speaking performance, Action research.

ỨNG DỤNG HOẠT ĐỘNG KHOẢNG TRỐNG THÔNG TIN NHẰM TĂNG VIỆC THAM GIA NÓI – NGHIÊN CỨU CẢI TIẾN ĐỐI VỚI SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN ANH NĂM NHẤT TẠI ĐẠI HỌC HẢI PHÒNG

TÓM TẮT

Mục tiêu của nghiên cứu này là cải thiện sự tham gia và hiệu suất nói của sinh viên lớp Ngôn ngữ Anh 5 - K17 (EM 5 - K17) - Khoa Ngoại ngữ (FLD) - Đại học Hải Phòng (HPU) bằng cách sử dụng các hoạt động khoảng trống thông tin.

Nghiên cứu được chia thành hai vòng: Vòng 1 bao gồm bốn cuộc gặp và Vòng 2 bao gồm hai cuộc gặp. Các dữ liệu đã được định lượng và định tính. Dữ liệu định tính thu được thông qua quan sát trong lớp và phỏng vấn giáo viên và học sinh. Dữ liệu định lượng được lấy từ và danh sách kiểm tra quan sát và kiểm tra (thử nghiệm trước, thử nghiệm tiến độ và sau thử nghiệm). Các hành động được thực hiện trong nghiên cứu này được mô tả là các hoạt động khoảng trống thông tin bao gồm triển khai thực hành tiếng Anh trên lớp trong

quá trình dạy học, cải thiện từ vựng của vinh viên thông qua việc kể lại một câu chuyện trước lớp và có trao thưởng cho sinh viên hoặc các nhóm có thành tích tốt nhất.

Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng việc thực hiện các hoạt động khoảng trống thông tin có thể cải thiện sự tham gia và hiệu suất nói của sinh viên.

Từ khóa: Hoạt động khoảng cách thông tin, tham gia nói, hiệu suất nói, nghiên cứu hành động.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

English is becoming more and more essential in many fields such as business, education, politic, and social communication. As a result, more and more non-native English speakers, including Vietnamese people, are trying to master this language in order to meet the demand at work and in everyday life. The emphasis on learning English can be seen from the education curriculums of both general and tertiary education where English is a core subject and is given considerable time and efforts.

The mastery of speaking is the first concern for most of foreign language students. Consequently, the success of foreign language learners sometimes bases on their improvement in speaking (Richards, 2008).

However, the importance of speaking is not generally backed up by the speaking participation of students in reality. This condition also occurs in Foreign Language Department (FLD) at Haiphong University (HPU). By observing and interviewing the English teachers and some students that the researcher had worked with, he discovered many problems related to students' psychological factors, the English teachers' teaching techniques and the teaching/learning media. Many students are unable to express their ideas and opinions in English. They usually find help from notes, memorize the texts or read them in front of the class. They are hesitant, worried, nervous and anxious when they have to present in English with teacher or in front of the class. Because of insufficient vocabulary and lack of practice in pronunciation, they can not express what they want to say in English or even pronounce words correctly. As a result, they were lack of confident to speak English, especially in front of the class and get stuck with the low speaking performance.

Moreover, during the observation in class English Major 5 – K17, the researcher saw that many students did not seem attentive to and enthusiastic enough with the teacher's instructions in the class. Many students were caught chatting with their classmates or doing personal business instead of paying attention to their lessons. In other words, these students showed their physical participation but not their oral and mental involvement in their lessons.

In addition, sometimes communicative situations were not created by the teacher in the class. In spite of the fact that the teacher could convey the materials well, she did not give enough chances for students to practice their speaking. Most of the time, the exercises were teacher-centered in the sense that the teacher spoke and gave instructions to the students. Moreover, modern learning media and equipment were not used in the lessons to support the teaching process and to make the lessons more attractive.

Consequently, the students felt bored and tired of repeating the same learning activities and they passively took part in the speaking activities in speaking classes.

From the observation above, the researcher attempted to find an effective approach to enhancing the speaking participation of students. Speaking activities should create enough time for students to practice the target language. The activities need to motivate students in order to boost their enthusiasm by engaging them in the learning process. It is the duty of the teacher to provide the appropriate feedback that helps students while doing the activity (Harmer, 1998).

The researcher decided to choose information gap activities namely telling and retelling folktales beautifully illustrated with video clips in English to enhance the students' speaking participation because they were familiar to the students in their mother tongue. This made it easier for the students to practice their speaking when they complete their speaking tasks. Information gap activities in such a form also can help the learning and teaching situation more entertaining. The students are not just listening to the teacher's instructions, but they can also interact with their classmates and practice speaking English. Finally, information gap activities may improve students' confidence and help them to gain better motivation in speaking. As far as the problems the students have in speaking and the advantages of using information gap activities in boosting students' speaking participation are concerned, it is crucial to conduct an action research in class EM 5 – K17.

Due to limited time and knowledge, the study mainly focused on measuring the effectiveness of applying information exchange activities in increasing the students' oral participation. This was shown by the data collected from observation, interview and tests: the increase in the number of the participating students in the speaking activities in class, the decrease in the number of the students with negative psychological problems in speaking classes and the improvement in the students' speaking performance. The study was carried out in class EM 5 – K17, who shared the same curriculum with the other six classes and who was also the class the researcher used to teach Speaking 1 and witnessed their learning problems before he started the MA course. In order to gather information for the study, observation, interviews and tests were implemented and the study lasted nearly a school year.

The research aimed to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: To what extent do information gap activities in speaking lessons improve the speaking participation of EM 5 – K17 majors at HPU?

RQ 2: To what extent do information gap activities help improve the students speaking performance?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The nature of speaking

Many definitions related to speaking are mentioned by experts in the field of language learning. According to Richards (2008), speaking involves the situations where the point is on what is said or done.

The message is the central focus along the side of how they interact socially with each other. Then, another definition said that speaking involves using speech to express meanings to other people (Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams, 2005).

Thornbury (2005) gave another definition which states that speaking requires the ability to cooperate in organizing the speaking turn. It also normally happens in real-time. Thus, he also claims that speaking consists of three stages: conceptualization, formulation, articulation and also self-monitoring.

From those definitions above, it can be said that speaking is the productive skill that needs participants to actively participate in speaking so that they can interact and express their intention with others. The speaker needs to have confidence and also competence in order to make a good conversation with others.

2.2. Teaching speaking

Speaking is the English skill that students should master in the language learning process which makes it the skill most needed to be mastered (Nation & Newton, 2009). Richards (2008) also states that the mastery of speaking skills in English is the first concern for many ESL or EFL students.

Teaching speaking needs to involve the participation of learners. The students' involvement can be created by many speaking activities. Harmer (1998) states that it needs to have a task requiring the students' use of language to complete and perform the task.

According to Richards (2008), there are three core issues need in planning English speaking activities. The first thing to do is finding out the focus of the speaking skills. The second issue is identifying the teaching approaches. Lastly, the teacher needs to determine the expected level of the speaking task and the criteria that will be used to test students' performance.

In teaching speaking, the teacher needs to consider many principles so that they make the tasks fit to the students' needs. Bailey (as cited in Nunan, 2003) mentions five principles for teaching speaking as below.

Firstly, the teacher should be aware of the differences between second language and foreign language learning contexts and determine the position of English in their own teaching situation whether it is teaching English as a second language or teaching English as a foreign language. For example, at HPU, English is taught as a foreign language

Secondly, students should be given enough opportunities to practice with both fluency and accuracy. The teacher is expected to provide students with many fluency-building practices in which making mistakes and learning from them are parts of their learning experience so that they can develop their fluency and accuracy.

Besides, students should be provided with opportunities to take part in such learning activities as group work or pair work because these offer opportunities for students to negotiate the meaning of what their partners say, ask for and give clarification, give them more time to practice their speaking. At the same time, by using these activities, the teacher can wisely limit the speaking

time and give more time for students to speak in the target language during the learning process.

Finally, the teacher is expected to design classroom activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional and interactional speaking so that students will have to speak the target language in both transactional and interactional settings.

According to Brown (2001), the teacher has some different roles during the speaking activities.

He stated that the first role of teacher is as prompter. The students sometimes cannot think of what to say next or in some way lose the fluency. The teacher can help them by giving suggestions. If it can be done supportively, it will stop the frustration that some students feel when they come to a dead end of language or ideas.

The second role of teacher is participant. The teacher should be a good animator when asking students to produce a language. At other times, however, the teacher should take part in the discussion or the role-play themselves. Thus, the teacher can elicit covertly, introduce new information to keep the activity forward, guarantee continuing student engagement and generally maintain a creative learning environment. However, the teacher needs to understand the limit which they should not participate too much.

The final role he mentioned is feedback provider. When students have finished an activity, it is important that the teacher allows them to assess what they have done and that the teacher gives the feedback on what the students have done well and what they have not completed.

2.3. Participation

Students' participation is an important aspect of classroom interaction and has various definitions. As defined in Collins English Dictionary, student participation is "the extent to which students participate or involve themselves in a class, course, etc." It can also be defined in terms of three kinds of interaction, namely students to their teacher, students to students, and students to materials.

Students who are considered to maintain a good interaction with their teacher always take part in the classroom activities as well as contact the teacher by listening to what he/she says, responding to his/her questions or even making questions to ask him/her whenever they do not understand anything in the lessons. They become involved in what is happening in the classroom by asking for information or explanation, sharing personal experience in relation to the topics, or volunteering to perform an activity.

Unlike the student–teacher interaction, the interaction between students themselves is established by their group discussion or other group activities. The kind of interaction between students and materials can be understood as students' success in completing assigned activities.

2.3. information gap activities

An information gap is a situation in which the communication happens between two or more people and the information is known only to some of the people present (Li, 2005). More exactly, people normally exchange information with each other to get information which the other one does not know but they have

to acquire it. An information gap activity is a type of gap activities that forces the participants to think. It is an activity that requires the learners to share or exchange information or opinions in order to complete a task.

It involves a process of transferring the information from one person to another in which each of the participants owns the information that is not shared by another. The problem can only be solved if they exchange and place the information together.

An information gap activity needs at least two different versions of materials. Learners work in pairs or groups, then they get different information on their pages so that they have to communicate with other students to complete the task of join the information together.

The information gap means in real life conversation, people usually communicate to get information they do not have (Richards, 2006). As a result, the information needed to reach an outcome is divided (evenly or unevenly) between the students. This divided information has many effects (Li, 2005). First of all, it provides each student a reason to take part in. Secondly, it makes each student need to understand the others' talk. Thirdly, it gives a huge impression of group cohesiveness, because the success of completing the task of each student depends on the other one. Furthermore, the dividing of information is mostly effective for raising the amount of negotiation of meaning in an activity (Long & Porter, 1985 in Li, 2005). The gap can also generate the highly need to communicate as well as the need to cooperate (Lee and VanPatten, 2003).

III. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. research design

Action research contains many stages that demonstrate the process of the actions. In this research, the researcher formulated problems related to the students' speaking participation and then took the actions to solve the problems.

In order to improve the students' speaking participation, the researcher used an action research that comprises four steps as presented by Kemmis and McTaggart (in Burns, 2010: 7-8).
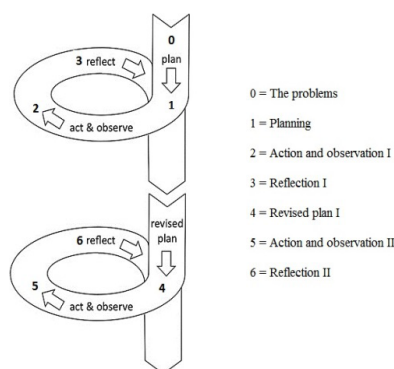
Figure 1: Action Research Cycles by Kemmis and McTaggart

According to the model above, the first step is planning. The researcher formulated some problems found in the class and then began to solve the problems after planning the actions. Along with taking actions, the researcher also observed the teaching learning process to identify the effect of the actions. This is also the period when the researcher gathered as much information related to the application of the actions as possible. The final step was reflection when the researcher assessed and reflected on what he had done.

The subjects of the research were the first year EFL students of class English Major 5 – K17 (EM 5 – K17) at Hai Phong University. There were 30 students including 7 male students and 23 female counterparts, most of whom come from the northern rural areas and had not had many opportunities to practice speaking skill at high school. Coming back as a researcher, he made a classroom observation and interviewed the English teacher and the students of EM 5 – K17 to identify the problems and saw that the students got low participations in speaking activities in speaking lessons.

3.2. Procedures of the research

Using the action research's model of Kemmis and McTaggart, this study consists of four steps in each cycle as follows.

3.2.1. Planning

In this step, first the researcher conducted classroom observations in order to identify the problems. Then he conducted interviews with both the students and the English teacher to know more about the problems in the class. After that, the researcher and the English teacher asked to have the group meeting with the other teachers of speaking skill in the Division to discuss the problems in the speaking skills and found out the most appropriate solutions to solve them.

Observations 1 and 2, made by the researcher and the collaborator, aimed at identifying the problems of the students had in learning English speaking skill.

3.2.2. Observation

The first two observations were made to identify the problems the students had in learning speaking skill and in speaking lessons. Besides, the students' self-evaluation was also made in order to provide more information about the teaching – learning situation. Six more observations were made in the six meetings with the students during the two cycles applying information gap activities, the aims of which was to reflect the benefits of using information gap activities to increase the students' participation in speaking lessons and to collect as much information as possible about how to use these activities more effectively on the next occasions.

3.3. Data collection instruments

The research was conducted basing on both qualitative data obtained from the classroom observations and the interviews with the English teacher, the colleagues in the Division, the collaborator and the students; and quantitative data gathered from the students' speaking scores in the pre-test, the progress test and the post-test.

3.3.1. Observation

Observation was used as a useful data collection instrument in this research because it allows the researcher to collect all the authentic information about the situation in the class. Burns (2010) points out that some observations are conducted in the written form by using narrative and descriptive style. These observations are used to record the teaching - learning process, such as the physical layout, verbal and non-verbal information, sequence of activities or the structure of the groups.

3.3.2. Interviews

Interview is one of the most used techniques for collecting qualitative

data. Its goal is to conduct a conversation that explores the researcher's focus idea (Burns, 2010). Thus, the researcher conducted interviews with the students, the English teacher, and the collaborator in order to find out their reactions, responses, opinions, suggestions, and expectations concerning the implementation of IG activities in the speaking lessons.

3.3.3. Tests

According to Brown (2001), a test is a method to measure a person's knowledge or competence in a given domain. Three tests were used by the researcher to track the improvement of students' speaking skills before and after using information gap activities. In all the three tests, each pair of students was expected to choose a test paper and speak English about the chosen task in three minutes. Their performance was assessed according to the Marking Scale developed by the researcher basing on the authentic speaking rubric by O'Malley, J.M., and Pierce L.V (1996), which had been introduced to the students before the tests were actually given. In the examination room, three pairs were preparing and one pair was presenting, which means each pair of students had about 6-9 minutes for preparation.

3.4. Techniques of the data analysis

Because of the implementation of both qualitative and quantitative data in the research, the researcher decided to use the stages of data analysis proposed by McKernan (as cited in Burns, 1999) to analyze the data, which consist of assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes.

The first step was assembling the data. First of all, the data from the observation and interviews were collected in the form of field notes, observation checklists and interview transcripts. Then, the data were scanned in order to be analyzed more deeply in the next step. In the coding data step, after being categorized, the amounts of data are reduced to numbers and then it leads to the next step: comparing the data. The data were compared in order to see whether the patterns or themes are repeated or developed across different data gathering techniques. Hence, the next step is data interpretation when the data were interpreted by the researcher. The final step is reporting the outcomes. The researcher discusses the data and makes sure that the findings and outcomes are well supported by the data.

Meanwhile, Microsoft excels was used to analyze the quantitative data. The researcher used this program to find out the average scores of each speaking aspect. Then, the result of the analysis was used to identify the improvement of the students' speaking skills.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Findings from observations and interviews

Table 1 below presents the students' self-evaluation on the 16 biggest problems they had in their speaking lessons. The information revealed that almost all of the students shared such psychological problems as hesitance, shyness, nervousness, fears and unconfidence in speaking English and their dislikes of the boring topics and of being corrected and evaluated by the teacher in class. This was

proved by the number of students with yes-answers to these problems varying between 13 to 26 equivalent to 43.3% to 86.6% among the total number of 30. Nineteen students (63.3%) reported that they had limited vocabulary, which led to their attempt to speak Vietnamese in English speaking lessons. Between 17 and 23 students (56.6 % – 83.3%) mentioned the ineffective ways the learning activities were carried out in their speaking lessons.

Table 1: The students' self - evaluation of their problems in English speaking lessons

N0	ITEMS FOR SELF-EVALUATION	N0 of students got problems
1	Be hesitant to speak English	25 (83.6%)
2	Be too shy to speak in front of the class	21 (70%)
3	Be unconfident to speak	22 (73.3%)
4	Be nervous when speaking English	18 (60%)
5	Be afraid of making mistakes in speaking English	20 (66.6%)
6	Be uninterested in the topics	19 (63.3%)
7	Disliked being corrected by teacher when speaking	19 (63.3%)
8	Being afraid of being evaluated by teacher	20 (66.6%)
9	Speak Vietnamese	18 (60%)
10	Have limited vocabulary	19 (63.3%)

Table 2: The students' self - evaluation on the way the teaching activities were carried out in their class

N0	ITEMS FOR SELF-EVALUATION	N0 of students got problems (Total: 30)
	Let students work individually	17 (56.6%)
	Call on individual students to speak	23 (76.6%)
	Correct students' mistake when they are speaking	25 (83.3%)
	Not organize pair work	22 (73.3%)
	Not organize group work	21 (70%)
	Not use visual aids: pictures, video clips…	30 (100%)

This information was coincident with that from the interviews with the teacher and the students before IGA were employed. First, the teacher reported that she had the difficulties with the students who had limited vocabulary, low competence in grammar and poor pronunciation, insufficient confidence in speaking English in class and that she occasionally designed pair or group work speaking activities in speaking lessons because they were time-consuming (See Transcript 1A). Second, the interviews with five students also revealed that they had the aforementioned problems.

This information seemed to have given the satisfactory account for the results from Checklist II taken noted of during the first two observations on the student's level of participation. As can be seen from Table 6 below, only 6-10 students (20-33.3%) were on task while the others failed to take part in the lessons or did their own things during the lessons. These data showed the

students' low participation in class and the ineffectiveness of the speaking lessons.

In short, the information from Checklist 1 and from the first interviews with the teacher and the students gave the answer to the first research question: "What factors prevented students of EM 5 – K17 majors at HPU from participating in speaking activities?" This led the researcher to the decision to choose the most suitable and effective solution to the problems.

Therefore, information gap activities were chosen as a practical solution to tackle the negative psychological factors and to ease the language difficulties which prevented the students from participating in speaking activities in class. Applied in speaking lessons in class EM – K17, information gap activities namely storytelling and retelling activities organized in pairs and groups proved their beneficial role in increasing the students' oral participation in speaking classes. The gradual increase in the number of students taking part in the speaking activities in speaking lessons can be seen from the data in Table 6 below.

Table 3: The improvement on the students' oral participation during the six meetings using IGA

State	Number of students on/off task – Percentages					
	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4	Meeting 5	Meeting 6
On task	11 (36.6%)	13 (43.3%)	15 (50%)	19 (63.3%)	22 (73.3%)	25 (83.3%)
Off task	19 (63.4%)	17 (56.7%)	15 (50%)	11 (26.7%)	8 (26.7%)	5 (16.7%)

As can be seen from Table 3, the number of students taking part in the speaking activities increased from 11 (36.6%) in Meeting 1 to 19 (63.3%) in Meeting 4 and interestingly up to 25 (83.3%) in Meeting 6. These results showed that the implementation of IGA has proved to be effective in enhancing the students' participation in speaking classes.

The students' self-evaluation of their problems in the English speaking classes after Cycle 1 and 2 also provided the good feedback about the use of IGA. From the data in Table 8 below, we can see that the number of the students having negative psychological problems decreased from the maximum 18 - 25 60% - (83.3%) before the intervention down to 8

(20.3%) – 14 (30.6%) after Cycle 2. The figure of the students describing their ineffective learning style also reduced from 18 (60%) – 20 (60.6%) to 8 (20.6%) – 13 (40.3%) after the second cycle. We can also see the sharp fall of the number of the students with the yes responses to the statements describing the way the learning activities were took place in their speaking classes from 21 (70%) – 30 (100%) to 0 (0% - 12 (40%) at the end of Cycle 2. These data proved that the use of IGA helped to ease the students' difficulties in their learning and they also showed the great improvement in the teacher's teaching techniques, which in turn improved the students' involvement in speaking classes.

Table 4: Students' self – evaluation on the their problems after Cycle 1 and 2

N0	ITEMS FOR SELF-EVALUATION	N0 of students got problems Before the intervention	N0 of students got problems After Cycle 1	N0 of students got problems After Cycle 2
1	Be hesitant to speak English	25 (83.6%)	18 (60%)	14 (46.6%)
2	Be too shy to speak in front of the class	21 (70%)	16 (50.3%)	12 (40%)
3	Be unconfident to speak	22 (73.3%)	17 (56.6%)	13 (43.4%)
4	Be nervous when speaking English	18 (60%)	12 (40%)	8 (20.6%)
5	Be afraid of making mistakes in speaking English	20 (66.6%)	17 (56.6%)	14 (46.6%)
6	Be uninterested in the topics	19 (63.3%)	14 (46.6%)	11 (30.6%)
7	Disliked being corrected by teacher when speaking	19 (63.3%)	12 (40%)	9 (30%)
8	Being afraid of being evaluated by teacher	20 (66.6%)	14 (46.6%)	9 (30%)
9	Speak Vietnamese	18 (60%)	14 (46.6%)	8 (20.7%)
10	Have limited vocabulary	19 (63.3%)	15 (50%)	13 (43.4%)

Table 5: Students' self – evaluation on the way the teaching activities

were carried out in their class after Cycle 1 and 2

N0	ITEMS FOR SELF-EVALUATION	N0 of students got problems Before the intervention	N0 of students got problems After Cycle 1	N0 of students got problems After Cycle 2
11	Let students work individually	17 (56.6%)	9 (30%)	6 (20%)
12	Call on individual students to speak	23 (76.6%)	16 (50.3%)	10 (30.3%)
13	Correct students' mistake when they are speaking	25 (83.3%)	18 (60%)	12 (40%)
14	Not organize pair work	22 (73.3%)	3 (10%)	1 (3.3%)
15	Not organize group work	21 (70%)	2 (6.3%)	1 (3.3%)
16	Not use visual aids: pictures, video clips…	30 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

It is clear that the students showed the great improvement on both the amount of participation they had in the speaking lessons and their language performance. As can be seen from Table 9, in the first 3 meetings it was observed that the students still experienced such negative psychological problems as hesitance, unconfidence, nervousness and fears; but in the next three meetings these problems did not seem to be the obstacles according to the observers' opinions (3A/1D and 4 D). The other difficulties related to the students' language skill were reported to be minimized in the last three meetings. Three among the four observers reported that the students' speaking time was longer in Meeting 4 and 5 and especially all of them agreed that the students had the longer speaking time in the sixth meeting, which once more revealed the great effectiveness of using IGA in the speaking lessons.

4.2. Findings from tests

In addition to the findings from the classroom observation and interviews with the teacher of English and the students in Class EM K17, to evaluate the students' progress in speaking performance to confirm the effectiveness of applying Information Gap Activities, the researcher also conducted tests including the pre-test, the progress test, and the post-test to assess the students' speaking performance. The scoring process was conducted by the researcher and the collaborator. The results of the pre-test, the progress test, and the post-test are presented below.

Table 6: The result ofthePre-test in each aspect

Rater	Fluency	Accuracy	Vocabulary
Rater1	1.17	1.3	1.37
Rater2	1.3	1.4	1.4
Mean Score	1.24	1.35	1.39

Table 7: The result oftheProgress test in eachaspect

Rater	Fluency	Accuracy	Vocabulary
Rater1	2.14	2.05	2.11
Rater2	2.26	2.11	2.17
Mean Score	2.20	2.08	2.14

Table 8: The result ofthePost-test in each aspect

Rater	Fluency	Accuracy	Vocabulary
Rater1	3.13	3.03	3.13
Rater2	3.13	3.00	3.03
Mean Score	3.13	3.01	3.08

In the Pre-test, the students' speaking performance was a little poor. They could not speak English fluently when they exchanged the information about the assigned topics. Most of them seemed afraid of speaking English. They showed their limited vocabulary and their poor pronunciation.

After information gap activities were conducted in the four meetings of speaking classes in Cycle 1, there could be seen certain improvement in the students' speaking performance.

In Cycle 2, the application of information gap activities in the second cycle proved to successfully achieve the goal of improving the students' participation in speaking classes, which can be seen from the result of the performance of students in the post-test.

The following table presents the comparison of the students' mean scores in the pre-test, the progress test, and the post-test with the gain score of each aspect.

Table 9:TheComparison oftheStudents'Mean Scores intheTests

Test	Fluency	Accuracy	Vocabulary
Pre-test	1.24	1.35	1.39
Progress test	2.20	2.08	2.14
Post-test	3.13	3.01	3.08
Gain score	1.86	1.66	1.69

As can be seen from the table above, the students' mean scores in the speaking aspects increased after the information gap activities were applied in the teaching - learning process. The students' mean scores in fluency increased 1.86 from 1.24 in the pre- test to 3.13 in the post-test. The accuracy aspect increased from 1.35 in the pre-test to 3.01 in the post-test. The students' mean scores in vocabulary aspect also increased 1.69 from 1.39 in the pre-test to 3.08 in the post-test. The general findings of the students' mean scores in the pre-test, the progress test, and the post-test are presented in the following table.

Table 10:Thegeneral findings ofthestudents'mean scores inthetests

	Pre-test	Progress test	Post-test	Gain score
Mean Scores	1.33	2.14	3.07	1.74

According to the information presented in thetable, it can be seen that there was great improvement in the students' mean scores from the pre-test, the progress test, and finally the post-test. The table also revealed that the students' mean scores in the post-test was higher than those in the pre-test and in the progress test. The gain score was 1.74. In conclusion, the results from the three tests once more confirmed the students' improvement in speaking performance in pairs and groups which resulted from the effectiveness of using information gap activities.

V. CONCLUSION

The research was conducted on April 2017 with a view to improving the speaking participation of the first year English majors at Foreign Language Department of Hai Phong University by using information gap activities. From the analysis of the findings of the research in the previous chapter, it can be stated that the use of information gap activities successfully enhanced the students' speaking participation. In other words, the progress of the students' speaking participation was greatly attributed to the implementation of information gap activities in the teaching - learning process. This can be seen in the following analysis.

Firstly, being conducted in pairs and/ or in groups, the information gap activities created more chances for the students to practice their speaking by enabling them to interact with the other friends.

Secondly, the improvement could be seen from the teaching learning process.

Thirdly, the students' vocabulary became much richer than it used to be.

One more conclusion is that during the application of Information Gap Activities, the teachers had many difficulties in time management and class management. As discussed in the previous chapter, while the students working in pairs and groups they were making a lot of unexpected noise and it was not easy to overcome this problem. Another difficulty for the teachers is that these activities are very time-consuming, so the teacher hardly meets the time requirements. Instead of carrying everything in class, the teachers have to set the final part of the lesson as homework.

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