

USING INFORMATION GAP ACTIVITIES TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS IN SPEAKING LESSONS FOR THE FIRST-YEAR NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LAW, VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY - HANOI

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ABSTRACT:

This study is to explore the use of information gap activities to motivate students in speaking lessons for the first-year non-English major students at the University of Law, Vietnam National University - Hanoi (VNU-Hanoi). The study focuses on describing the importance of information gap activities to motivate students to speak English and using information gap activities to motivate students in speaking lessons. The study also intends to provide suggestions for English teachers to prepare English speaking lessons at the University of Law, VNU - Hanoi.

Key words: information gap activities, speaking lessons, non-English major students.

1. Introduction

It is undeniable that English has been an essential means of communication and more and more Vietnamese students are aware of the importance of English to their study and their future. The ability to communicate in English clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learners at school and success later in every phase of life. Speaking plays an important role because without it, communication cannot take place directly between people. However, speaking is generally considered the most difficult to learn among the four skills in English language learning.

In order to teach the students English speaking so that they become more interested in and maintain their interest in speaking learning. The English

teachers should provide a rich environment where meaningful communication can take place. Communication occurs when there is lack of information between or among a group of people. They have to exchange to share the information they have with other people. The efficient activities to motivate students in speaking lessons are Information Gap Activities. This kind of activity makes students more active in learning process and at the same time makes their learning more meaningful and interesting.

At University of Law – Vietnam National University, non-English major students often admit that they have difficulty in learning English speaking skill. Most of the students do not know how to make a conversation; they are very passive

in making a conversation. One of the reasons for this situation is that they lack practice in using English in real communication situations. These students come from different provinces with different language levels. When they were at high school, they got used to Translation Grammar teaching method in which the teachers focused on the rules of grammar structures and practiced the drills to remember those structures. They did not have chances to practice speaking skills. When entering university, students have awareness of the roles of English to their future. They themselves have changed the ways to learn English. However, the teachers must find out suitable techniques which create a need for students to use the structures they have learnt to communicate with each other to make a meaningful conversation. In my opinion, one effective solution to this problem is using Information Gap Activities to encourage students to use English for communicating. The benefits of this technique to my students have aroused my interest and encouraged me to carry out this research “Using Information Gap Activities to motivate students in speaking lesson for the first-year non-English major students at University of Law-Vietnam National University”. Hopefully, this study will make a small contribution to the implementation of Information Gap Activities in improving speaking skills for students at UL - VNU.

Students lack practice in speaking English in real communicating situations is one of the main reasons for the students’ inability to make a meaningful conversation. One solution is using information gap activities to motivate students. The questions to be dealt with are:

1. What are the causes of the students’ low motivation in English speaking activities?
2. What is the importance of using information gap activities in motivating students in speaking lessons?
3. What suggestions are given for teachers to apply information gap activities at UL-VNU?

2. Research methods

The method employed in this study is an action research, with the uses of three instruments: observations, questions and pre-tests and post-tests. All comments, remarks, recommendations and conclusion are based on the data analysis.

The combination of different instruments used in this research would help to gain reliable data and a close investigation into the problems that the students were having.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Students’ attitude towards the speaking skill

Table 1: Students’ attitude towards speaking skill

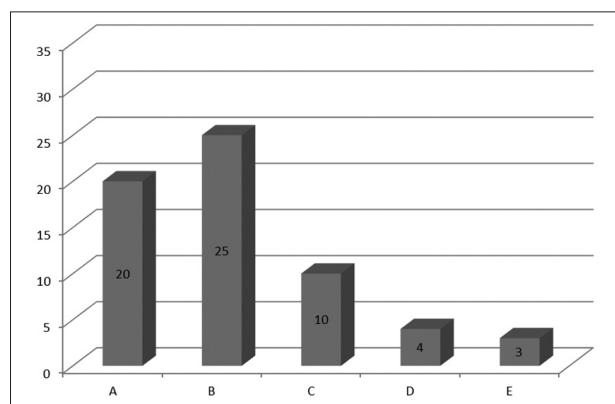
Questions	Options	Results (%)
Q 1	How important is English speaking skill to you?	
	A. Very	47
	B. Rather	17.6
	C. Little	20.7
	D. Not at all	14.7
	E. Don't mind	0
Q 2	How often do you feel unwilling to speak English in class?	
	A. Always.	23.5
	B. Usually.	35.3
	C. Sometimes.	14.7
	D. I speak whenever I am told to.	11.8
	E. I always seek for chances to speak in class.	14.7

Table one presents the information about students’ attitude towards speaking skill. As can be seen 54.6 % of the students claim that speaking skill is important to them while 20.7 % suppose speaking skill is little important and it is not important at all for 5%. It can be seen that the students have high attitude towards speaking skills.

However, most of them feel unwilling to speak English in class. 25 students corresponding to 73.5 % always and usually feel unwilling to speak English in class. Among these students, 8 students always feel unwilling, 12 students usually feel unwilling and 5 students sometimes feel unwilling. Only four of them said that they spoke whenever they are told and five students answered that they always seek for chances to speak in class. These figures prove that the frequency of the students’ unwillingness in speaking was high.

It can be concluded that the majority of the students agree that English speaking skill is really significant. However, the number of students who feel willing to speak in class is small. So what are the reasons for this situation? The answer can be found through question 3 and question 4 in Questionnaire 1.

Chart 1: Students' reasons for learning English



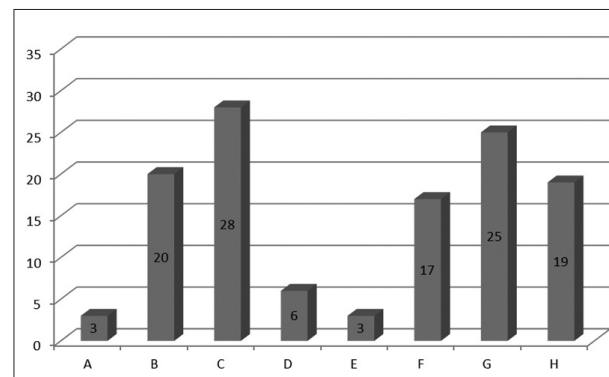
- A. English speaking is necessary for their future job.
 B. English speaking is compulsory at their school.
 C. They are interested in English speaking skill. D. They want to be able to communicate in English.
 E. Others:.....

In response to question 3, only 10 students stated that they were interested in English speaking skill, 8 students wanted to be able to communicate in English, 20 students believed that English speaking is necessary for their future job while 25 students claimed that they learned English speaking because it is compulsory at school. Three of them gave another reason that s/he wanted to go abroad after graduating. In short, many students are aware the necessity of English for their future job. However, the number of students admitted that they studied English because it was a compulsory part in school syllabus is the highest.

3.2. Factors causing students' low motivation in speaking English

In an attempt to find out factors leading to the students' low motivation, the researcher gave out the question "What factors makes you unwilling to speak English in class?" A large number of students (28 students) expressed that one of the factors was that they were afraid of making mistakes then being laughed at by other classmates, 25 students felt unpleasant with the atmosphere in the

Chart 2: Factors causing students' low motivation in speaking English



- A. Being not interested in English speaking.
 B. Learning goal is not to communicate in English.
 C. Being afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by my classmates.
 D. Being afraid of making mistakes and being criticized by my teacher.
 E. My teacher's lack of enthusiasm in English speaking classes.
 F. Having nothing to say
 G. Not having relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
 H. Monotonous speaking activities.

classroom. Other factors raised by 20 and 19 students were that their learning goal was not to communicate in English and speaking activities were monotonous. Only 6 students referred to being of afraid of making mistakes and being criticized by the teacher, 3 referred to being not interested in English speaking and 3 students to the teacher's being unenthusiastic in English speaking classes.

In summary, the findings in Questionnaire 1 revealed many useful facts related to the students' motivation. Firstly, most of the students learned English speaking mainly because it is a compulsory part in school syllabus. More than half of the students were aware of the importance of English speaking to them but the frequency of the students' unwillingness in English speaking was high. The main causes were: learning goal is not to communicate in English, the speaking activities used in the classroom were monotonous, the students were afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by other classmates and the classroom atmosphere was not really relaxed. These findings were really important because it would help the

researcher form the hypothesis of using information gap activities to motivate students in speaking lessons and decide on the intervention later.

4. Conclusion

The teachers should learn and be creative to find the suitable ways to teach speaking effectively. In order to help students motivate in speaking lessons, the teachers should be aware of the advantages of using information gap activities in teaching speaking. They can use various information gap activities in speaking lessons and organize to implement them effectively.

When using information gap activities in teaching speaking, the teachers had better prepare carefully. The activities need to be very carefully structured, especially at lower levels so that the students can do the activities smoothly. It is very difficult for students to come up with ideas at the same time as having to cope with the language. They need something to speak about, such as a picture or a purpose language. Therefore, the handouts need to be available with photocopies. The teachers have to make sure that students in each pair get different parts of the exercise and stop students looking at each other's information. The teachers have to find the suitable ways of adapting the activities for use in a large class.

In order to motivate students to speak English while using information gap activities, the teacher should take care of some other factors as follows:

* *Create a friendly classroom atmosphere:* Along with the teacher's behaviors and enthusiasm, classroom atmosphere is an important factor contributing much to the students' motivation in learning speaking. To make the classroom less stressful, teachers should establish a good relationship with students; especially take much care of anxious and less able students to encourage them to communicate. Furthermore, the teacher

should create supportive and non-threatening environment so that students feel more relaxed, free and flexible about expressing their opinions among their own group.

* *Promoting cooperative learning:* Cooperative learning improves communication, lower students' anxiety, raises their self-esteem, and improves classroom climate. Learning English through cooperative group work allows students to learn from one another, and the teacher in a supportive environment. They become more proficient in language as a result of group work because they have more comprehensible input peer interactions, have better listening skill as a result of responding to what has been said, have longer conversational turns than in whole-class teaching situation, and focus on meaning rather than on accuracy (Kessler, 1992).

* *Respond to students' work:* Teachers should give students proper feedback on students' speaking as quickly as possible. Give students some indication of how well they have done and how to improve. For example, he can say a student's presentation or a pair's performance was good, with an indication of why it was good: "Lan's presentation is very good. Her ideas about pollution really synthesized the ideas we had been discussing."

* *Give clear explanation:* Some recent research shows that many students do poorly on assignments or in participation because they do not understand what to do or why they should do it. Teachers should spend more time explaining why we teach what we do, and why the topic or approach or activity is important and interesting and worthwhile. In the process, some of the teacher's enthusiasm will be transmitted to the students, who will be more likely to become interested. Similarly, teachers should spend more time explaining exactly what is expected on activities. Students who are uncertain about what to do will seldom perform well ■

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**SỬ DỤNG CÁC HOẠT ĐỘNG
KHOẢNG TRỐNG THÔNG TIN ĐỂ TĂNG ĐỘNG LỰC
TRONG GIỜ HỌC NÓI CHO SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ NHẤT
KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGÔN NGỮ ANH
TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC LUẬT,
ĐẠI HỌC QUỐC GIA HÀ NỘI**

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Khoa Tiếng Anh - Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội

TÓM TẮT:

Nghiên cứu này nhằm đánh giá tính hiệu quả của việc sử dụng các hoạt động khoảng trống thông tin trong việc thúc đẩy động lực của sinh viên trong các giờ học nói dành cho sinh viên năm thứ nhất không chuyên ngôn ngữ Anh tại Trường Đại học Luật, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội. Nghiên cứu tập trung vào việc miêu tả tầm quan trọng của các hoạt động khoảng trống thông tin trong việc thúc đẩy sinh viên nói tiếng Anh và việc sử dụng các hoạt động này để tạo thêm động lực cho sinh viên trong các giờ học nói. Ngoài ra, nghiên cứu này cũng có mong muốn đưa ra một số gợi ý cho các giáo viên giảng dạy tiếng Anh để có thể chuẩn bị các tiết học kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh cho sinh viên tại Trường Đại học Luật, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội.

Từ khóa: các hoạt động khoảng trống thông tin, các tiết học nói, sinh viên không chuyên ngữ.