INFORMATION-GAP SPOKEN ACTIVITIES

I. Background

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) postulates the important part of realm of education and becomes an EFL teachers’ compound duty in providing the best methods, approaches, and techniques during learning process. Both teacher and student always get into a scrape when they make the effort to actively speak in interactive communication. It is a must, in the L2 classroom, to teachers to encourage his or her students to speak communicatively at all. The students try to listen to the instruction, analyze it, give feedback, and try to respond to effective communication.

It is 101 or 1001 approaches, methods, and techniques that the teachers can use to run his or her classroom efficiently and effectively but the thing is not so easy as speaking. It might be for a teacher knows and understand the approach, methods, and techniques but s/he still confusing in applying them as the rules in teaching and learning process. This is actually just all about willing ‘to challenge their students not just to memorize, but to question, examine, create, solve, interpret, and debate the material in their courses’ (Crowford et al., p. 1, 2005). In 1963, Antony’s model of language teaching was hierachyly presented to most teacher training manuals which consisted of three levels; Approach, Method, and Technique. These three terms would be scientifically acceptable in the realm of teaching and learning process. Some approaches, methods, and techniques might be best to teaching and learning process but they are absolutely appropriate to certain situation of teaching and learning process.
During the ages, researchers have been trying to find out the best method based on the approaches and they did found. Teacher-centred approaches, Student-centred approaches, and partnership approaches (Brundrett & Silcock, 2002) might be the basic approaches in formulating the best methods in order to trigger the appropriate techniques in teaching and learning process. Even though teacher has some best methods and implemented techniques, s/he is competent, but s/he must comprehend that a certain circumstance will have certain best method and technique. Brandrett (2005) stated that a competent teacher is not always successful in performing the class and s/he can enjoy her or his success besides her or his lack of skill. So, the thing is to understand that one method will be best for certain circumstance.

This scientific paper will present one method of language teaching and learning process. The method is about “Information-Gap Spoken Activities”. This method might be interesting and applicable if teachers are aware of the situation of learning process.

II. **Discussion**

A. **The Information Gap Theory**

Information-gap Theory is a method to analyze, plan, decide and design an uncertainty or non-probabilistic quantification. An IGT is actually used to analyze data and the model of data which are uncertain in research. Some research data and design sometimes are being uncertain in some aspects and the researcher should try to analyze and understand those uncertainty. Ben-Haim (2006) said that Info-gap theory is useful precisely in those situations where our best models and data are highly uncertain, especially when the horizon of uncertainty is unknown. He further said that An info-gap analysis is not based on an
estimate of the true horizon of uncertainty. An IGT contains the effort of analyzing and treating in interaction, as Sauro, Kang, & Pica (2005) stated that information gap tasks can be designed as instruments for data collection and analysis and as treatments in interaction research. Sauro et al. said that IGT requires the exchange of uniquely held information, they promote modified interaction among participants and orient students’ attention to form, function, and meaning.

The important of understanding IGT is significantly needed in terms of conducting the EFL classroom activities deal with Information Gap-Spoken Activity even though this theory is referring to research need but teachers at least need this in order to provide them good approach, appropriate method, and techniques in conducting the IGSA activity. The point of this theory is to estimate or guess, design, and treat any unique information and modified interaction in order to get the form, function, and meaning of information given in uncertainty condition. The other point of knowing this theory is to provide the students the ability to analyze any information given orally to decide appropriate aims of unclear information. This is rather difficult but challenging to those students who want to have the ability of understanding oral and written information. Ben-Haim (2006) said that everyone makes decisions, but not everyone is a decision analyst. The context of a decision analist here is oriented in research application and implementation but there is an important implication to be put into account in terms of Information Gap-Spoken Activity, that is, to be a decision analyst.

There are two terms to be pointed out here namely ‘decision’ and ‘analyst’. A decision analyst means a person who analyze a decision made. The analyst has to have the ability to estimate the information in a shape of a decision then try to interpret the appropriate meaning and
purpose. Here, the students learn how to utter the gist both in oral and written information given even if the information given in numeric or statistic form. The domain does not oriented to true and false or justification but it is more to increase the ability to speak as a form of decision. Ben-Haim (2006) said that the freedom to decide is an opportunity to err; but every opportunity is also a potential for success. Therefore, the point is to be successful and students’ capability to share information is not much demanded because the central of IGT is that decisions under severe uncertainty must not demand more information, or at least not much more, than the decision maker can reliably supply, and that is not much in the conditions under which the decision must be made (Ben-Haim, 2006).

B. The Information-Gap Spoken Activities

The successful teaching is when students are able to gain language competence, language comprehension, and language production. In other words, the students are able to use the language to fluently communicate. Speaking activity is important to do in order to make this comes true and this can facilitate students’ interest to learn any language. Ur (1996) in Raptou (2001) lists the characteristics of a successful speaking activity as follow:

1. *Learners talk a lot.* As much as possible of the period of time allotted to the activity is in fact occupied by learner talk.

2. *Participation is even.* Classroom discussion is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants: all get a chance to speak, and contributions are fairly evenly distributed.

3. *Motivation is high.* Learners are eager to speak: because they are interested in the topic and have something new to say about it, or because they want to contribute to achieving a task objective.
4. *Language is of an acceptable level.* Learners express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easily comprehensible to each other, and of an acceptable level of language accuracy.

There are many indicators that show a successful speaking but the main point is able to communicate and there are many ways to conduct to achieve that goal. One of the ways is Information Gap-spoken Activity. This activity tends to find information as the learners need to fullfil the missing information. Son (2009) said that “An information gap activity is an activity where learners are missing the information they need to complete a task and need to talk to each other to find it.” This activity trains the learners to have interpersonal interaction in order to get the information they need to complete understanding on a task or to complete information that they do not have. Montoya (2011) said that this activity refers to the fact that in real communication people normally communicate in order to get information they do not possess.

Information gap activity is the way of encouraging speaking ability. Stevic in Watamni & Gholami (2012) said that speaking refers to the gap between linguistic expertise and teaching methodology. Linguistic expertise concerns with language structure and language content. Ideally, L2 acquisition and learning should put speaking activity into account. Habermas 1970; Hymes 1971; Jakobovits 1970; Savignon 1971 in Savignon (2002) stated that Communicative language teaching (CLT) refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning. The central theoretical concept in communicative language teaching is “communicative competence,” a term introduced into discussions of language use and second or foreign language learning in the early 1970s. Speaking ability is one of the skills that the learners should learn and perform. Learning this skill will empower the learners to meet their
satisfactory in learning foreign language. Even though they can write, read, and listen to, but the fact is that mostly students are dissatisfied when they are not able to speak fluently at all. They need to speak, they need to deliver their ideas verbally so that they feel satisfied in the learning foreign language. Dealing with learning skill, Ur (1991) stated that the process of learning a skill by means of a course of instruction has been defined as three-stage process namely Verbalization, Automatization, and Autonomy. The following is how the three stages are described on figure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOX 2.1: SKILL LEARNING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VERBALIZATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher describes and</td>
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<td>demonstrates the skilled</td>
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<td>behaviour to be learned;</td>
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<td>learners perceive and</td>
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<td>understand.</td>
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Taken from Ur (1991) A Course in Language Teaching-Practice and Theory

In a research done by Asrobi, Seken, & Suarnajaya (2013) showed that information gap activity is effective as follow:

...the study reveals that information gap technique is more effective to be used for teaching speaking to the tenth grade students of MAN Selong than conventional technique. Information gap technique encourages cooperative relationships among students. This further gives students the chance to work on negotiating meaning and feel more comfortable to speak. On the other hand, when students work in small groups, the communicative practice they receive will be maximized. In this way, students also learn to pay attention not only to communicating the intended meaning, but also to the social context of the communicative event (Asrobi, Seken, & Suarnajaya, 2013, p. 8)

There are some points deal with the results of the research such as the following:
- Encouraging cooperative relationship
- Giving the chance to work on negotiating meaning
- Feeling more comfortable to speak
- The communicative practice will be maximal
- Learning to pay attention to communicating intended meaning
- Learning to pay attention to the social context of the communicative event

All results above are becoming the advantages of doing information gap in the classroom. These point should be the motor for the teachers to encourage speaking task in the classroom. Dealing with the benifits, Son (2009) also presents some advantages of using information gap activity as describing below:

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<tr>
<th>More communication takes place</th>
<th>Motivation can be high.</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Extending speaking practice.</td>
<td>- Give students a reason to talk.</td>
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<td>- Make learners to concentrate on the communication for information.</td>
<td>- Keep them thinking.</td>
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<td>- Learners talk a lot/ produce more speech.</td>
<td>- Represent real communication and factual learning</td>
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<td>- Learners help one another.</td>
<td>- Equal opportunities of learning for mixed ability classes.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Build students’ confidence</th>
<th>Develop other sub-skills.</th>
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<td>- Less intimidating than presenting in front of the entire class.</td>
<td>- Clarifying meaning,</td>
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<td>- Comfortable, casual and non threatened atmosphere</td>
<td>- Re-phrasing,</td>
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<td>- Free interaction with peers</td>
<td>- Negotiating meaning,</td>
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<td>- Solving problems,</td>
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<td>- Gathering information,</td>
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<td>- Making decision</td>
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He further said that the information gap activities involve a transfer of given information from one person to another—or from one form to another or from one place to another. The participants each have some knowledge or information not shared by any other one and can only solve the problem if they pool their information.
In doing this activity, teachers should be as creative as possible dealing with the form of information gap activity. The teachers should pay attention to the needs of the students that appropriate to the model of activity conducted in the classroom.

a) Types of Information Gap Activities

In general, information gap activity consists of two types namely One-way and Two-way. According to McKay & Tom (1999) in Jondeya (2011) as quoted in (The National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics, 2004, p. 4, ch. IV) stated that one-way occurs when one person holds information which other group member(s) do not have. In contrast with One-way, Ellis (1999) in Jondeya (2011) said a two-way information gap activities, both learners have information to share to complete the activity e.g., both have some information about directions to a location, but they have to share the information that they have to complete the directions.

The Two-way seems to be better activity rather than One-way because Two-way activity is more communicative and performing more action verbally to complete the tasks.

According to Savignon (2002) in Savignon (1972, 1997) that competence is defined in terms of the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning and looks to both psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives in second language acquisition (SLA) research to account for its development. Dealing with meaning-focused activity, Prabhu (1987) presented three types of Gap activity as follow:

- Information Gap. This activity involves a transfer of given information from one person to another – or from one form
to another, or from one place to another – generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language. The pair work task is appropriate to this gap activity in which each part of the pair has a part of the total information and attempts to convey it verbally to the other. The other activity in this Gap is completing a tabular representation with information available in a given piece of text.

- **Reasoning-gap Activity.** This activity involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns. This activity necessarily involves comprehending and conveying information, as in information-gap activity, but the information to be conveyed is not identical with that initially comprehended. Students can do Filling the gaps in a schedule or timetable and completing the picture.

- **Opinion-gap Activity.** This activity involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation. In this activity, the students can do story completion and also taking part in the discussion of a social issue. The activity may involve using factual information and formulating arguments to justify one’s opinion, but there is no objective procedure for demonstrating outcomes as right or wrong, and no reason to expect the same outcome from different individuals or on different occasions.

There are other two types that included in Gap activity such as follow:
- **Experience-gap Activity.** This activity involves past experiences to complete the tasks given. Jondeya (2011) stated that All students in classes have had different experiences in their lives, so this type is a good task for communication. Questionnaires can be exploited the experience gap, particularly those that aim to practice past form, e.g. a questionnaire to find out what games people played when they were children.

- **Knowledge-gap Activity.** This activity involves prior knowledge about the world or general knowledge to complete the tasks. The different knowledge of the students can mediate to fulfil the tasks given. Littlewood (1991, p. 91) in Jondeya (2011) said that Students know different things about the world. This gap can be exploited in brainstorming and general knowledge style quizzes.

Information gap activity is actually covered in Structured Output Activity includes Jigsaw activity. Each type of information gap implies the finding missing information and negotiating information to complete any task given.

b) Types of Information in Gap Activity

In Gap activity, there are two types of information involved as Jondeya (2011) presented as follow:

- **Supplied-to-the-learner**
  This kind of information appears when the gap is created by giving one or more group members information which others do not have. This type of information is called by Susanti (2007) in Jondeya as spotting the difference. For instance, giving one person one version of a picture, giving
another version of the same picture to their partners, and asking them to identify the differences between the two pictures.

- Supplied-by-the-learner
  This type of information is supplied by the learners to give information concern their life or knowledge they possess. For instance, Jacobs (1998) in Jondeya presented such as asking students to interview each other about their families would be an example of unique information which learners supply from knowledge they already possess.

c) The Teacher’s Role in Gap Activity
  Berns (1990) in Savignon (2002) provided one of eight principles of CLT. He said that language teaching is based on a view of language as communication. That is, language is seen as a social tool that speakers use to make meaning; speakers communicate about something to someone for some purposes, either orally or in writing. This principle should be the teacher’s task in providing comprehensible input for his/her students. Dealing with information Gap activity, teacher has role in activating and developing students' ability as shown by different methodologists (Jondeya, 2011):

- Teacher as a designer and organizer.
  Sometimes it is forgotten that a teacher should be a designer. s/he should design his/her syllabus, lesson plan, and classroom. s/he should know how to design them all to be fit to his/her teaching. After going through designing principle, it is important too for teachers to organize. What to organize is of course his/her students in classroom. s/he should know how to organize his/her students during
learning process to provide conducive learning environment. Dealing with Gap activity, teacher should know how to design which Gap activity appropriate to his/her classroom and organize better way in doing the Gap activity.

- Teacher as a participant and prompter.

Being a participant in the classroom activity has been forgotten at all for a teacher. Teachers sometimes feel superior to his/her students so that they tend to be not becoming a participant in certain activity. In fact, it is supposed to the teachers to become a participant in certain students’ activity. The benefit is to offer information directly to the class and at the same time stimulate and present new language, without taking the main initiative for communication away from the students themselves (Jondeya, 2011). The sense of togetherness will be coming around the classroom when teachers become participant in all modesty. Teacher would be rather the hero if s/he can participate in his/her students’ activity.

When students lose their fluency because they sometimes do not know what to say further in speaking, then it is a teacher’s task to be a prompter. s/he should give help to the students who experience such situation. Harmer (2001) in Jondereya (2011) said that while taking the role of a prompter, the teacher offers discrete suggestions or lets students struggle out of a difficult situation (when students get lost, cannot think of what to say next, lose fluency), which can stop the sense of frustration when coming to a ‘dead end’ of language ideas.
Teacher as an investigator and assessor.
As investigators, the teachers themselves will want to develop their own skills and will hope for a gradually deepening insight into the best way to foster language learning (Jondeya, 2012). Investigating is one of the teacher’s task during teaching practise. s/he should always doing investigating whether his/her teaching has some problems or not. It is important to investigate students activities during class in order to do evaluation. In doing such evaluation, means that teacher is doing assessing. The last thing that a teacher does is to investigate and assess the students’ activity in information Gap. Teachers should have some points to be put into account after doing investigation on the activity, Gap activity and then giving assessment.

III. Closing

There is no one method that is more excellent over to the other methods. It is only method that is appropriate to the time of activity and for certain activity. Information gap-spoken activity is not only the best technique in encouraging speaking ability but others as well.

Information Gap activity is a technique that can make students acquire the target language. It also increases motivation, self confidence, and developing sub-skills.

Information Gap activity encourages cooperative relationship, gives the chance to work on negotiating meaning, enables students to feel comfortable to speak, increases communicative practice maximally, enables students to communicate intended meaning, teaches students to pay attention to the social context of the communicative event.
From types of Gap, types of information involved in Gap activity, and the teachers’ role in Gap activity are actually the technique in conducting the information gap activity. Type of Gap will determine the type of information involved but the teachers’ role will determine the progress of Gap activity itself.
References


Son, Tran Lam. 2009. Using Information Gap Activities to Promote Communication in EFL Classes. 5th National VTTN ELT Conference. Hanoi


