Conversation Activity in English for the sixth Grade Students in Khon Kaen Demonstration Primary School (Suksasart), by using Information Gap.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to develop and test students’ ability of English conversation skills for the sixth grade primary students. The target group was 38 students of the 6\textsuperscript{th} grade, from the Demonstration Primary School (Suksasart), of Khon Kaen University, Semester 1 Academic Year 2011. The research design was one experimental group design. The research tools were 15 lesson plans, student’s and teacher’s observation forms, student’s participation evaluation form, Information Gap and Student’s satisfactory evaluation form, conversation test at the end of each cycle and satisfactory measurement form. The result showed that 74 percent of the students passed and therefore exceeded the required 70 percent score criterion.

Keywords: Action Research, Information Gap.

1. Introduction

The Thai government has in the recent years focused increasingly on the importance of education, and in 1991 the National Education Act B.E. 2542 was issued, in order to constitute a base for this approach and strategy. Education should be based on the principle that all students must be capable of learning and of self-development, within the educational strategy that we put forth. To activate and stimulate this ability in each and every student, are regarded as being the most important aspect. The teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling the learners to develop themselves at their own pace and to the best of their potentiality (MOE, 2542). Therefore, in order to fulfill the objectives in the area of foreign languages, students have to be skillful and knowledgeable in English language
because this is vital for developing their intelligence, and for their ability to communicate and interact on the social arena, whether on a basic level or on a more cultivated one. And English is especially important when it comes to continuing to higher education.

Today, English is the major international language and is widely used all around the world. It plays important roles for many people. The development of technology and communication also doubles the importance of – and the necessity for – English language skills because it is used for transcultural communication. A vast variety of learning resources can be accessible with English language skills, and especially now in our “high-tech technology age”, English is one of the fundamental languages in the foreign language subject area, because of internet and the immense amount of information that is available.

In the Basic Education language subject area for Primary schools, it is therefore highly important that everyone can complete the basic core curriculum required courses. (Core Curriculum B.E 2551.) However, there are a lot of Thai people today that are not able to communicate in English even though they have studied English as a basic education for almost 12 years; for example: Graduators of undergraduate or graduate levels. In the recent report of Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) conducted by The National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS) in all of the subject areas: Thai language, Social studies, English, Mathematics, Sciences, Health and Physical Education, and Vocational Education and Technology, revealed that the score of English skills are 31.75, which is the lowest average score of all subjects at the level of the 6th grade, and the highest average score is Health and Physical Education. Even though there are more accessible English learning resources today, for example; native English-speaking teachers, English songs, movies, and internet, people could ask the question why Thai students’ ability in English language is not different from – or better than in – the past. Some scholars said that it was time to develop learning and instruction by adjusting language teaching methodology. (Ref. Wongleka, 2553.)

It is already officially suggested that during the ASEAN Economic Community to be held in 2015, English will be more important than in previous years, both for participants and for the interested public, especially as a communication and speaking skill, and it is therefore important to activate the teaching methodology that can prepare for this.

From the general statements I have mentioned above, I will now move on to address the specific research process with Information Gap as a main tool in the educational strategy. The purpose for the researchers would be to assess whether the students’ English speaking ability would be better after being trained in English speaking skill, as laid out by our Information Gap system, than before. Lesson plans with Information Gap activities were therefore designed and implemented into the class; and each student was meant to use English language in order to share and to present themselves, and to try to talk a little about their daily life – and especially to find and describe details in the surrounding environment, was emphasized here – this strategy also follows the learning standards and indicators of The Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E 2551 (2008 A.D.).

The results from this study would be one of the directions or parameters for designing English speaking activities also for other levels of students.

In Information Gap activity, two students practice together, the whole target group works in pairs of two. Information Gap is an exercise where the purpose is that one student needs some information that the other student has access to, so that each student, will help to fill the “Information Gap” of the other student. This is therefore meant to activate the ability of communication in each student, their English language skills, and also the imagination and creativity of the student, since they have to achieve some information that they do not have themselves. Each student has his own worksheet, with different information on, so that each paper completes the other paper by delivering the missing information or the “gap” that is left out.

Information Gap is therefore a teaching strategy where the purpose is to activate the students, by letting out parts of vital information, so that the students has to find it themselves, by helping each other.

2. Research Questions.

Our Research Questions, was as follows:

2.1. Will the percentage of all the students that passes our test, when it comes to the ability of English speaking
skills after learning in the lesson with Information Gap-activity – be more or higher than the normally required 70 percent of the total score criterion?

2.2. How is the satisfaction of the students themselves toward learning via Information Gap activities?

3. Research objectives.

3.1 To develop the English speaking skill of students in the 6th grade by using Information Gap-activity lesson plan in the class; At least 70 percent of students should pass the 70 percent of the total score criterion.

3.2 To study about the satisfaction for the students themselves toward learning via Information Gap activities.

4. Scope of study.

4.1 Research Design. Action Research is used in the study.

4.2 Target Group: 38 students of the 6th grade, from the Demonstration Primary School (Suksasart), of Khon Kaen University, Semester 1 Academic Year 2011.

4.3 Variables.

4.3.1 Independent Variable is the lessons with Information Gap activity.

4.3.2 Dependent Variable are;

1) English speaking skill of students of the 6th grade.

2) The Satisfaction for the students themselves toward learning via Information Gap activities.

4.4 Learning Content.

The content used in the lesson is based on the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E 2551 in the foreign languages subject area. Various types of speaking activity are; 1) Finding the right preposition, 2) Describing places, 3) Health conversation, 4) Conversation of Nationality, 5) Asking and Giving direction, and 6) Asking and Giving information on the phone.

4.5 Duration. Research was conducted in semester 1 academic year 2011 for 15 weeks in total.

5. Research Tools. Various tools were used to collect the data.

5.1 The 15 different fifty-minute lesson plans based on English communication theory, focusing on speaking skills.

5.2 Student’s observation form.

5.3 Teacher’s observation form.

5.4 Student’s participation evaluation form.

5.5 Speaking test at the end of cycle 1.

5.6 Speaking test at the end of cycle 2.

5.7 Speaking test at the end of cycle 3.

5.8 Student’s satisfactory evaluation.

5.9 Speaking skill achievement test.

6. Data Collection.

6.1 Target group were taught via lesson plans for 15 weeks; 50 minutes per week. The researchers were the teachers and they also reflected upon the class. Tools and material were used as following:

6.1.1 Teaching with lesson plan 1-2: Shape and lesson plan 3-4: Haunted Ghost. A speaking test was used at the end of cycle 1.

6.1.2 Analyzed the data from the speaking test of cycle 1 and reflected the lesson from observation forms.

6.1.3 Teaching with lesson plan 5-6: Green Tea Town and lesson plan 7-8: What’s your nationality? A speaking test was used at the end of cycle 2.
6.1.4 Analyzed the data from the speaking test of cycle 2 and reflected the lesson from observation forms.


6.1.6 Analyzed the data from the speaking test of cycle 3 and reflected the lesson from observation forms.

6.1.7 Speaking achievement test and satisfaction form are taken by student. After that, all data is analyzed, concluded, and discussed.

7. Data Analysis.

7.1 Speaking tests at the end of each cycle were analyzed with Difficulty (p), Discrimination (r), and Reliability by using TAP program.

7.2 The test scores of students from the test were analyzed with Percentage and Standard Deviation (S.D.)

8. Conclusion.

8.1 Teaching by applying Information Gap activity resulted in 74 percent of students who passed the 70 percentage score criterion; higher than the prediction, as shows on table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Maximum score</th>
<th>Test Mean</th>
<th>Percentage of Test Mean</th>
<th>Students that pass the 70% criterion</th>
<th>Percentage of the Students that pass the 70% criterion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that of 38 students, taking the test with 20 points as a maximum score, the average score in the total target group was 14.8 points, which means 74%. And 29 students passed the 70% criterion, which means 75.4% of the total target group (38 students) passed the criterion set for the research. The objective of the research was to see if we could achieve, with this particular Information Gap activity, that at least 70% of the students could pass the 70% of the total score criterion.

8.2 Satisfaction of students toward Information Gap activities in speaking lesson was at excellent level. Satisfaction toward content was also excellent. However, satisfaction toward type of activities and materials was at good level.


9.1. Teacher should have the relevant competence and control the learning standards of the course objective. Moreover, competence in language teaching theory, teaching techniques and methodology should be emphasized.

9.2. Challenging activities should be promoted, so students can practice critical thinking skills on the tasks.

9.3. The rules of activity should be told to the students very strictly in order to attain the goal of the lesson; no cheating when doing Information Gap task.
9.4. Teacher should explain clearly how to do the task to the students before starting the activity; sometimes new words and idioms are introduced during this step, and teacher should brief about this as well. Students should be confident about their task and clearly understand how to do the activity.

10. References.


