

**IMPROVING THE SPEAKING SKILL
OF VIII E STUDENTS IN SMP NEGERI 1 MUNTILAN
THROUGH INFORMATION-GAP ACTIVITIES**

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APPROVAL SHEET

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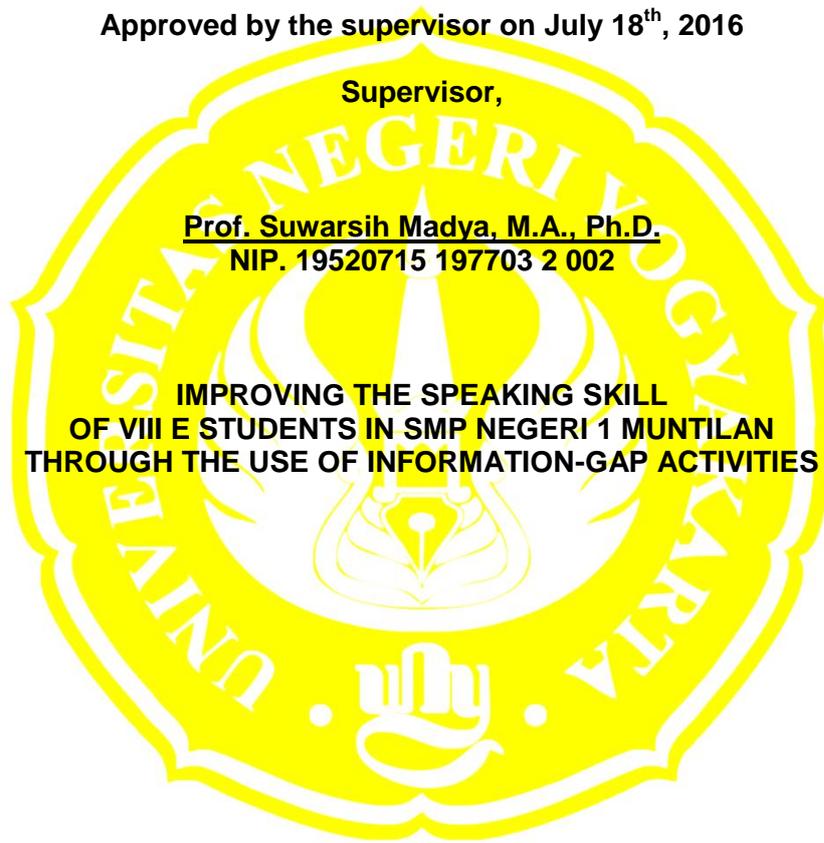
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**Improving the Speaking Skill
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Through Information-Gap Activities**

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Abstract: This action research study was aimed at improving the speaking skill of VIII E students in SMP Negeri 1 Muntilan academic year 2015/2016 through information-gap activities. This action research study was conducted in two cycles. The first cycle consisted of four meetings while the second five meetings. The actions carried out in the research were using classroom English during the teaching and learning process, engaging the students in pre-communicative activities, involving them in information-gap activities, encouraging them to consult their dictionaries and vocabulary note book, setting a fun learning atmosphere and appreciating the students' participation and achievement. The data were qualitative and quantitative in nature. The qualitative data during the research process collected through observing the teaching and learning process, having interviews with the students and research collaborators, distributing open questions to the students, and asking the students to make some learning journals. The instruments used to collect those data were observation checklist, interview guidelines, and open-ended questions sheets. Data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification were used to analyze the qualitative data. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were obtained by assessing the students' speaking performances by using an assessment rubric. The research results show that the students' speaking skill was improved through involving the students in information-gap activities. The improvements were mainly on their speaking fluency, interactive skill, and vocabulary mastery. The grouping technique used in conducting the activities supported the students' speaking skill improvement as it enabled the students to stimulate each other to speak up. As a result, in general, all students were more confident to practice to speak in English.

Key words:

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Introduction

In this globalization era, people need to compete and cooperate with others. The competition and cooperation are not merely within a single country. There has been large opportunities for people to compete and cooperate with other people

around the world. In this situation, international languages of which one is English plays a very important role as a means of communication.

Since English is important for carrying out communication, consequently, it becomes one of the compulsory subjects in Indonesia. One of the learning target in this subject is the students' ability to speak in English. As the students learn the language in order to communicate, the learning activities should enable them to acquire the language and be able to use it as a means of communication. In the field which I observed, however, there were several problems related to the English teaching and learning process. Based on the results of the observations conducted on November 5th, 26th, and 28th, and the interviews done during the reconnaissance step, it was revealed that there were several problems occurring in the English class in class VIII E SMP Negeri 1 Muntilan. The speaking practices that the students had were not communicative. They did not facilitate the students to be able to speak spontaneously. Besides, the teaching and learning process did not involve much participation from the students. Most of the activity the students had was listening to the teacher's explanation. There was not much chance for the students to contribute actively to the teaching and learning process. Consequently, the students were not used to participating actively in the process. These problems will be elaborated further in the point of problem identification in this chapter.

The findings above then motivated me to conduct a classroom action research in class VIII E SMP Negeri 1 Muntilan in the Academic Year 2015/2016. After my collaborators and I discussed the problems found out and considered the most crucial problems, we decided to focus the classroom action research on improving the students' speaking skill through activities that enable the students to acquire the language and thus be able to use it as a means of communication.

Research Method

Based on the literature review, the problems identified in the field could be solved by involving the students in information-gap activities. As what has been elaborated previously, information-gap is one of the crucial features of real communication. In this kind of activities, students are required to speak in English to bridge the information-gap they have with their communication partners. In nature, the activities were guessing game and interview. On the other hand, these activities would be done in small groups to enable the students to stimulate each other to speak up and help each other to solve the difficulties they might encounter. In addition to this, the materials to be used in the activities would be those related to the students' real life. Therefore, the speaking practice would resemble the oral communication the students have to handle in their real life.

To support the students' speaking skill improvement through information-gap activities, there were several other actions. Those were using classroom English during the teaching and learning process, engaging the students in pre-communicative activities, encouraging the students to consult the dictionaries and vocabulary note books, setting a fun learning atmosphere, and appreciating the students' participation and achievement. In accordance with the objective which

was improving the students' speaking ability through information-gap activities, this action research study was in the form of action research. The subject of this action research study was VIII E students in SMP Negeri 1 Muntilan in the academic year 2015/2016.

Following the action research procedure proposed by Kemmis and Mc Taggart in McKay (2008), this action research consisted of four steps. Those were the step reconnaissance, planning, action and observation, and reflection. Therefore, I at first developed a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening, acted to implement the plan, observed the effect, and reflected on these effects as the basis of a further planning. This action research study consisted of two cycles. The first cycle consisted of four meetings while the second cycle five meetings. At the end of the second cycle, there was some discussion between my collaborators and I about whether or not there would be the third cycle. Based on the discussion of the observation during the two cycles, my collaborators and I agreed that the students' speaking skill had improved. Therefore, we decided to end the research. Four kinds of instruments were used to gain the data during the research. They were observation checklist, open-ended question sheets, interview guidelines, and speaking assessment rubric. Additionally, a camera was used to video tape the process of the research implementation. Besides, a voice recorder was also used to record the interviews with the students and collaborators.

The data of the research were both quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative data were collected during the classes by using observation checklist and making vignettes, and outside the classes by distributing open-ended question sheets and having interviews. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were collected by assessing the students' speaking performances before and after the action research was carried out. In collecting the data, I worked collaboratively with collaborators. The data obtained during the research were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The students learning behavior change reflected on the vignettes, interview transcripts and questionnaires were analyzed qualitatively through the steps of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles and Huberman (in Madya,2011). Meanwhile, the students' speaking performance score before and after the research was carried out was analyzed quantitatively.

According to Anderson et al. in Burns (1999), there are five validity criteria that are suitable to be implemented in some transformative action research. Those are democratic validity, outcome validity, process validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity. In this action research study, all of those five validity criteria were fulfilled. To have the reliability of the data and findings by triangulation, I used three kinds of triangulation. Those were time triangulation, investigator triangulation and theoretical triangulation.

Findings and Discussions

Considering the problems identified, my collaborators and I formulated several actions to be carried out in the action step. Those actions were using classroom English during the teaching and learning process, engaging the students in pre-communicative activities, involving them in information-gap activities, encouraging them to consult the dictionaries and vocabulary note books, setting a fun atmosphere of learning, and appreciating the students' participation and achievement. The following table explains those actions, the obstacles, the improved actions and also the findings. The last column mentions conditions after the action implementation that still needed to be improved in further research.

Table 1. Research findings

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
1.	<p>Using Classroom English during the Teaching and Learning Process</p> <p>Classroom English was used to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> greet the students ask about their condition attract their attention give simple instructions ask simple questions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The students became used to greeting me in English Most of them gave positive responses to my classroom English 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the students were reluctant to practice communicate with their friends in English Most of the students found difficulties in understanding my classroom English 	<p>Using Classroom English during the Teaching and Learning Process</p> <p>Classroom English was used to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> greet the students ask about their condition attract their attention give simple instructions ask simple questions give simple 	<p>At the end of the cycle, most of the students spoke in English to their friends more than usual</p>	<p>Several students still preferred keeping silent than speaking in English to their friends</p>

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
	give simple explanation			explanation Action Improvement a. The students were required explicitly to speak in English with mutual support among them b. Some English expressions were pasted to the class wall to help the students master daily English expressions c. The rate of delivering some explanation in English was lowered		
2.	Engaging the Students in Pre-Communicative Activities a. Analyzing input texts	1) In general, the students were enthusiastic in being	1) Only few students were willing to volunteer themselves to read aloud the	Engaging the Students in Pre-Communicative Activities a. Analyzing input texts	1) The students participated actively through analyzing the input texts, discussing the	1) Several students were dominating in the quizzes

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
	b. Discussing the contents of the texts c. Discussing the key vocabulary in the texts d. Discussing the grammar rules to express the intended meanings e. Doing written exercise focusing on the grammar building f. Discussing the answers to the exercises g. Drilling pronunciation	involved in each of the activity 2) They participated actively in the discussion of the contents, key vocabulary and key grammar rules used to express the intended meaning 3) 50-75% of the students were willing to contribute their answers to	texts	b. Discussing the contents of the texts c. Discussing the key vocabulary in the texts d. Discussing the grammar rules to express the intended meanings e. Doing written exercises focusing on the grammar building f. Discussing the answers to the exercises g. Drilling pronunciation Action Improvement: a. Continuous encouragement was given to motivate the students to be confident in	content of the texts, discussing the key vocabulary in the texts, doing written exercises focusing on vocabulary enlargement, discussing the answers to the exercises, being involved in quizzes, being involved in the pronunciation drills, and doing homework 2) More students volunteered themselves to read aloud the input texts 3) 75-100% of the students contributed their	2) Sometimes , several students deliberately spoke in languages other than English

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
		the discussion of the answers to the exercises		volunteering themselves in being involved in the activities b. Vocabulary exercises were designed more interestingly to attract the students' enthusiasm in enlarging their vocabulary mastery c. Quizzes were held to strengthen the students' vocabulary mastery and to raise a competition atmosphere in the learning process	answers to the discussion of the exercises 4) The students' made the most of the opportunities given to them to correct any wrong answers written on the boards 5) The students wrote in their vocabulary note books any new words they found while discussing the input texts 6) The students were more enthusiastic in doing and discussing the answers to the exercises since	

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
					they were designed more interestingly	
3.	<p>Involving the Students in Information-Gap Activities</p> <p>a. The students were involved in information-gap activities whose natures are guessing game and interview</p> <p>b. They were grouped into small group consisting of 4-5 students for each</p>	<p>1) All of the students practiced to speak in English with their friends</p> <p>2) In general, the students' interactive skill and fluency on speaking improved through the activities</p> <p>3) The students stated that the small grouping gave them</p>	<p>1) Most of the students did not pay attention to the activity rules of conduct</p> <p>2) The students wanted to prolong the first information-gap activity by exchanging their card set to other groups' but they could not do so since the card sets all groups had were the same</p> <p>3) The students</p>	<p>Involving the Students in Information-Gap Activities</p> <p>a. The students were involved in information-gap activities whose natures are interviews</p> <p>b. They were grouped into small group consisting of 4-5 students for each</p> <p>Action improvement:</p> <p>a. Different cards and extra cards were provided as a backup</p> <p>b. A careful explanation of the activity rules was</p>	<p>1) Most of the students stated that they were fond of the activities they had</p> <p>2) In general, the students' interactive skill and fluency on speaking improved through the activities</p> <p>3) They improved their verbal interactions by having jokes in English without ignoring the task</p> <p>4) Different card sets and extra cards enabled the students to</p>	The students' pronunciation and grammar accuracy on speaking did not improved maximally yet

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
		<p>a comfortable situation to practice to speak in English</p> <p>4) Small grouping enabled the students to stimulate each other to speak</p>	<p>used phrases more than sentences to describe animals, people and things</p>	<p>given to guide the students in being involved in the activities</p> <p>c. Activity sheets were provided to assign the students more to communicate verbally</p> <p>d. The students were required explicitly to describe the people and animals in sentences other than phrases</p>	<p>exchange the cards whenever they needed to</p> <p>5) The students' verbal communication was enhanced by the activity sheets they had</p> <p>6) The students used complete sentences more often to describe animals, people and things</p>	
4.	Encouraging the Students to Consult the Dictionaries and Vocabulary Note Books	<p>1) The students started to be aware of the importance of dictionaries to help them learn</p>	<p>2) At the beginning, there were only 3-5 students who were aware of the importance of consulting their</p>	<p>Encouraging the Students to Consult the Dictionaries and Vocabulary Note Books</p> <p>Action improvement: 1) Verbal encouragement was given more</p>	<p>1) In general, all students became aware of the importance of consulting their dictionaries to help them learn English</p> <p>2) Vocabulary note</p>	-

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
		English	dictionaries independently 3) Vocabulary note books were not yet consulted maximally	frequently to remind the students of the use of dictionaries 2) The students were required to write in their vocabulary note books any new words they found	books were used more frequently since the students wrote there the new words they found while analyzing the input texts	
5.	Setting a Fun Atmosphere of Learning a. Making jokes during the teaching and learning process as intermezzi b. Giving fun yet appropriate sanctions to the students who violated the rules	1) The students enjoyed the learning process without feeling threatened since jokes were amply carried out 2) Sanctions given by asking the students	-	Setting a Fun Atmosphere of Learning a. Making jokes during the teaching and learning process as intermezzi Giving fun yet appropriate punishments to the students who violated the rules	1) The students stated that they could enjoy the learning process without feeling threatened since jokes were amply carried out	-

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
		(who violated the rules) to sing or mime made the other students amused and enjoyed the learning process				
6.	Appreciating the Students' Participation and Achievement a. Giving the students verbal appreciation b. Making an achievement board to build a competition atmosphere among the	1) The students were pleased by the verbal appreciation given to them frequently 2) They stated that they were motivated	-	Appreciating the Students' Participation and Achievement a. Giving the students verbal appreciation b. Making an achievement board to build a competition atmosphere among the students	3) The students were pleased by the verbal appreciation given to them frequently 4) They stated that they were motivated to compete with each other in participating and achieving	If the achievement board is used in a long period of time, the size of the pasted stars and the available space might need to be considered.

No.	Cycle 1		Obstacle	Cycle 2		Weakness
	Action	Result		Action	Result	
	students	to compete with each other in participating and achieving something by the availability of the achievement board			something by the availability of the achievement board	

Table 2 below shows the students' quantitative scores on their speaking test before the research was carried out (pre-test) and after the research was carried out (post-test)

	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Mean Score	$\frac{329.5}{23} = 14.33$	$\frac{391}{23} = 17$

Before the research was carried out, the students used to prepare what they wanted to say in practicing to speak in English. They were not yet able to speak in English spontaneously. By being involved in the research, the students improved their speaking skill in certain aspects that will be elaborated in the following paragraphs. Based on the interviews with the students and the discussion I had with my collaborators, the students' speaking skill was improved through information-gap activities. The improvement could be identified from the students' ability to develop their ideas, and their improvements on the confidence to speak, fluency, interactive skill and vocabulary mastery. These improvements were supported by the grouping technique and the design of the information-gap activities. On the other hand, however, the students' speaking aspects of pronunciation and grammar accuracy still needed to be improved by the teacher. These findings will be elaborated further in the following paragraphs.

The students improved their speaking skill in terms of developing ideas. They could develop their ideas in describing people and pets from the first to the third information-gap activity. They could speak in English without being provided with any helping words. Besides, the students were more confident to speak. Those who used to be quiet were already able to speak cheerfully. They spoke up more than they used to. Meanwhile, those who were already good at speaking showed to be better. In terms of the speaking aspects, based on the discussion I had with my collaborator, the students had particularly improved their speaking skill in several aspects. Firstly, in terms of fluency, the students had been able to speak fluently without any preparation before. Secondly, they already used various vocabulary to describe people and pets. Thirdly, several students showed their awareness of their grammar mistakes and directly corrected that even though some other students still had mistakes on grammar such as missing the linking verb or violating the subject-verb agreement. Based on the observation, the students who had good awareness of the grammar accuracy were serious in the pre-communicative activities. It could be observe by the action of back signaling such as nodding their heads whenever they understood my explanation. This means that if the exercises focusing on the grammar building were paid more attention, and the teacher made sure that everyone understood, the students would be able to improve their grammar accuracy in speaking.

The students' improvements on their speaking fluency and interactive skill correspond with the theories elaborated in chapter 2. Among others, Harmer (2001:85) declares that the information-gap is a key to the enhancement of the communicative purpose and the desire to communicate. Concurring with this

theory, Littlewood (1981:17) states that communicative activities such as information-gap activities improve the students' motivation to take part in communication with other students. Thus, the activities enhance the students to practice to speak a lot and consequently they improved their speaking fluency and interactive skill.

In addition to this, the students' improvement on their vocabulary mastery was supported by the vocabulary exercises given in the pre-communicative activities and the information-gap activities themselves. The pre-communicative activities prepared the students with inputs of vocabulary. Besides, the information-gap activities enhanced their memory of vocabulary since they need it for communicating. This corresponds with one information-gap activities contributions to language learning by Littlewood (1981) that such activities allow natural learning.

The students' speaking skill improvements above were supported by the grouping technique. It supported the students' speaking skill improvement mainly in three ways. First, it gave the students a comfortable situation to practice to speak. It was because they were required to talk to their own friends. This made the students' confidence higher so the students joyfully practice to speak in English without feeling threatened anymore. Second, the students could also develop their interactive skill of speaking since they had friends to talk to interactively. Third, since the grouping technique was always considered, the active students were always spread out. This then enabled them to stimulate their friends to speak up. Also, this made it possible for all students in a group to help each other in terms of practicing to speak. As a result, all students were active and able to speak up.

On the other hand, however, the students' speaking accuracy on the pronunciation and grammar accuracy improved yet insignificantly. Those two aspects still needed to be improved. This is because in order to speak accurately, the students needed an incremental process. What was missing in the research was that the teacher should raise the students' awareness about the importance of grammar rules and pronunciation to express their meanings. By being aware, the students would have some concern of their speaking accuracy i.e. the grammar and pronunciation. Besides, meaningful drills need to be carried out sufficiently.

Conclusions

The research findings elaborated in chapter IV show that the speaking skill of VIII E students in SMP Negeri 1 Muntilan in the Academic Year 2015/2016 had been improved through information-gap activities supported by several supporting actions. They were using classroom English during the teaching and learning process, engaging the students in pre-communicative activities, encouraging the students to use their dictionaries and vocabulary note books, setting a fun atmosphere of learning, and appreciating the students' participation and achievement.

During the two cycles in the research, the students' speaking skill improvements were consistent. They showed their speaking improvement mainly on the speaking fluency, interactive skill and vocabulary mastery. Besides, in cycle 1, the students showed their learning behavior change. They were more active in the teaching and learning process. They were more confident to speak up. Dependably, in cycle 2, the students showed that their learning behavior change was consistent. Their motivation to be involved in the teaching and learning process was higher. They also enjoyed the process more. This was supported by the results of the observation, the interviews with the students, the discussion with the collaborators, the students' learning reflection, and the questionnaire results.

The qualitative findings on the students learning behavior changes above were supported by the quantitative assessment they got before and after the research was carried out. The results of the assessment I had with the students' English teacher as my first research collaborator show that all students had some improvements at different rates. The lowest quantitative improvement was 1.5 while the highest one was 4.5. The students' speaking skill improvements were mainly on their speaking fluency, interactive skill and vocabulary mastery. Meanwhile, their speaking accuracy on the grammar rules to express their intended meaning and the pronunciation still needed an incremental process to be improved more.

Following the main results of the research which were the students' speaking skill improvements, there were some changes as the effects of the action research implementation. Those changes were related to 1) the English teaching and learning process in the research setting, 2) the students' learning behavior, 3) the perspective on teaching English of the English teacher's and my colleagues', and 5) my own understanding of teaching English particularly to students of junior high schools.

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