USING CUED-DIALOGUE AND GAP FILLING EXERCISES TO DEVELOP IRAQI EFL LEARNERS' ABILITY OF SPEAKING

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Abstract :

This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of using cued-dialogue and information gap activities on developing speaking skills of the fifth graders in Diyala governorate schools. To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher adopted the experimental design on 24 October,2011. The sample of the study consisted of (69) male students divided into (35) students for the experimental group and (34) students for the control one. It is randomly chosen from Al-GhadilMushraq Secondary School in Diyala Governorate.

The researcher designed activities related to speaking topics, these activities are based on cued-dialogue and information gap activities which are used in teaching the experimental group, while the traditional method is used in teaching the control one in the first term of the school year (2011-2012).The Analysis of the results proves that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups in favour of the experimental group at each level of the speaking skills in the post test. In the light of those findings, the researcher suggested some recommendations that are hoped to help syllabus designers, supervisors and English language teachers in developing teaching speaking skills.In the conclusion of this study, the researcher has put forward some suggestions for futures researches.

1.1 The Problem and its Significance

Language is basically oral.Therefore, speaking occupies an important place in any matter of teaching and learning foreign languages. For most people, the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language since speech is the most basic means of human communication (Lazaraton, 2001:103). Nunan (2001: 225) says that the ability to function in another language is generally characterized in terms of being able to speak that language. When someone asks,"Do you know another language?", they generally mean "Can you speak the language?"

Most language learners, as Hadley (2003: 228), considers speaking ability as one of their primary goals of study. Hadley (ibid) attributes this mainly to either because students would derive some personal satisfaction from being able to speak a second language or because they feel that the ability to speak a second language would be useful in pursuing other interests or career goals. Despite this special status that speaking occupies among other skills, it has not always figured so centrally in second and foreign language teaching .AS a matter of fact, oral skills in EFL have been neglected for the most part of EFL history. Salih (1998:3) says that "it is a common experience of the teachers of English in Iraq that pupils at the secondary stage are very poor and hesitant when it comes to participation in dialogues, which can be considered a valid measure for learners of oral proficiency". Richards and Renandya (2002 : 270) and Brown (2001 : 201) mention that certain characteristics of speaking make it the most difficult skill to be acquired by second or foreign language learners. Such difficulty needs to be addressed appropriately by using the suitable techniques that would maximize opportunities for the development of the learner's oral skills. With the shift towards communicative language teaching that took place in the Iraqi EFL scene, the researcher feels that it is time to adopt the communicative techniques to achieve such goals.

1.2 Aim of the Study

This study aims at identifying the effect of using cued-dialogue and information-gap exercises on the development of preparatory school students' ability in speaking.

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

The aim of this study will be achieved through verifying the following hypothesis:

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the students who are taught speaking according to cued-dialogue and gap-filling exercises and that of the students who are taught speaking according to traditional techniques.

1.4 Limits of the Study

This study is limited to Iraqi EFL fifth – year preparatory school students during the academic year 2011-2012.

1.5 The Procedures

To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted:

1-selecting a sample of EFL students from fifth-years preparatory schools,

2-dividing the selected sample of students randomly into two groups   (experimental group and a control group),

3-designing a test of speaking and deciding the validity and reliability of the test,

4-pre- testing of the whole selected sample of the study in order to measure the initial level of achievement in speaking,

5-teaching the experimental group students according to cued-dialogue and information –gap exercises ; whereas teaching the control group students according to traditional techniques,

6-post- testing both groups in speaking at the end of the experiment, and

7-using suitable statistical means such as Pearson correlation coefficient test formula to analyze the collected data.

1.7 Definitions of the Basic Terms

For the purpose of clarifing the major terms which are used in this study they are defined as follows:

1.7.1 Gap-Filling Activities

Harmer (2007: 275) says that "information- gap activities are those where students have different pieces of information about the same subject and have to share this information (usually without looking at what their partner has got) in order for both of them to get all the information they need to perform a task".

1.7.2 Speaking

According to Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary (1995: 1141). *Speaking* "is making use of words in an ordinary voice; uttering words; knowing and being able to use a language; expressing oneself in words; making a speech".

3.7.3Cued- Dialogue is a technique for targeting intensive aspects of language which requires students to read a dialogue in which one speaker's lines have been omitted (Brown, 2005: 149).

2.0 Introductory Notes

The theoretical framework of the current study is comprised of two basic parts.Speaking as one of the most important and essential skills that must be practised, definitions of speaking skills, factors affecting students' speaking ability,communicative teaching and developing speaking activities,The second part deals with Cued-dialogue;its important, characteristics of the dialogue, and information gap-activities and preparing a lesson plan for information gap-activities.

2. Different Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Skills

In learning speaking, there are a lot of factors that highly influence the process of speech and that can affect negatively on acquiring speaking ability and obstructing students to speak fluently.According to Richards and Renandya (2005: 205), they mentioned four factors that affect students' oral communication ability such as :

A-) *Age or Maturational Concentraits*

Several scholars like Scarsella and Krashen (1990: 284) argue that those who begin learning a foreign language in early childhood through natural exposure activities higher proficiency that lose beginning as adults. This fact shows that the aging process itself may affect or limit the adult learners' ability to pronounce the target language fluently.

B-) *Aural Medium*

Listening plays an extremely important role in the development of speaking abilities. Speaking feeds listening which precedes it. So, speaking is closely related to listening which is the basic mechanism through which the rules of language internalized.

C-) *Social – Cultural Factors*

Language is a form of social interaction because linguistic communication occurs in the context of structured interpersonal exchange and meaning is thus socially regulated. Thus to speak a language, one must know how language is used in a social context.

D. *Affective Factors*

The affective side of a learner is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure. The affective factors relating to foreign language learning are: emotion, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitudes and motivation. These four factors play an important role in determining the success and the failure of students in learning speaking. Learning to speak a foreign language requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. Therefore, factors affecting EFL adult learners oral communication skills need to be taken into consideration by EFL teachers in order to provide guidance in developing competent speakers of English. If teachers are aware of these things, they will teach in a more appropriate way and it will help them to develop students speaking skills.

2.1 *Developments in the Teaching of the Spoken Language*

For many years, speaking, as the researcher referred to in the first chapter, does not receive the attention that it really deserves in

the FLT scene. Bygate (2002: 34) states that the teaching of speaking began to emerge as a concern in its own right only in the 1940s. He adds that prior to that, language teaching approaches either ignored speaking, as it is the case with the grammar-translation method, or were based on the use of texts. Bygate (2001: 14) also says that foreign language teaching methods in general have rarely focused on the production of spoken discourse. He attributes that to the following:

-Tradition: Grammar-translation methods to language teaching still have a huge influence on language teaching, marginalizing the teaching of communication skills.

-Technology: Only since the mid-1970s has tape-recording been sufficiently cheap and practical to enable the widespread study of talk whether native speaker talk or learner talk.

- Exploitation: Most approaches to language teaching (the direct method, the audio lingual approach) as well as more marginal approaches (such as the silent way, community language learning, and suggestopedia exploited oral communication centrally as part of their methodology: not as a discourse skill in its own right, but rather as a special medium for providing language input, memorization practice and habit information. Howatt (2004: 173) mentions that the European reform movement stressed the primacy of speech and the importance of adopting oral methodology in foreign language teaching classes. However,Bygate (2002: 34) argues that within this context, speech was used first as an effective way of presenting and demonstrating grammatical structures without using the first language, as in the direct method, and in Palmer's use of question-answer sequences in his 'oral method'.Second, it was used as a way of facilitating memorization.Therefore, spoken discourse was mainly represented through question-answer interactions or the use of written dialogues.

During the Second World War, consequences of neglecting speaking for many years became pronounced as the American

military found itself short of people who were conversationally fluent in foreign languages. Thus, it needed a way of training soldiers in oral- and aural skills quickly. American structural linguists stepped into the gap and developed a program which borrowed from the direct method, especially its emphasis on listening and speaking (Schmitt 2002: 5). The result was the emergence of audiolingualism. The latter put much emphasis on the spoken language and this emphasis led to a radical change in the type of material selected as a basis for teaching (Rivers, 1981: 41). In the 1970s, however, critics began to suggest that audiolingual drills were limited in that they failed to teach the typical forms and functions of oral language, and that   a functional approach might be more effective. This led to the introduction of drills and exercises that taught learners to express a range of speech functions (such as invitations, requests, apologies, offers, refusals) and to vary the degrees of formality (particularly in terms of politeness), though some began to include role play activities (e.g., Morrow and Johnson) (Bygate, 2002: 35). With the advent of the theory of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) and the practice of communicative language teaching, the teaching of oral communication skills as a contextualized activity has become the vocal point in many EFL classes (Lazaraton, 2001: 103).

3. Cued – Dialogue

Cued dialogue is a technique used for targeting intensive aspects of language which requires learners to read a dialogue in which one speaker's lines have been omitted from methodological viewpoint. A dialogue is an effective communicative device and effectiveness lies in its utilization in creative practice and use in a great variety of situations dealing with learners everyday life ;therefore, dialogues will help us to bring the outside life into the classroom and help the students to express themselves (Brown, 2005:169). Cued- dialogue is an activity in which pupils read a dialogue together but can only make their own part, which usually

includes opportunities for the pupils to make their own responses (Shehatha,2003: 6).

While Chastain (1988:275) states that in real- language dialogue in a normal fashion, participants must learn to attend, and produce a different type of utterance and to focus on many features of communication.

3.2 The Importance of Dialogue

Dialogue is a part of teaching language. Dialogue motivates us to practice with foreigners. However, dialogue has two important purposes; first it provides the students with a bit of language that helps them perform in a particular setting. The second is to introduce certain high- frequency patterns of the language that will be practiced further in the dialogue expression activities (Ministry of Education New York,2009). A dialogue is most important language teaching device that appeared in textbooks around the world, and though many language teaching techniques have come and gone since 200 A. D. The dialogue has survived his right down to the nowadays (Firth, 1964:3). While Brown (2001:169) mentions the advantage of dialogue is that the learners are not only able to understand the words of the foreign language, but also understand the correct language rules, it can be said that learning dialogue can represent the learners' interactions by using suitable words in sentences. Learning dialogue is not only helping the student to understand what he is saying, but also giving him a tool of analyzing vocabulary and grammatical discussion. Lane (1978: 58) describes other important aspects of dialogue. The first is the creation and maintenance of social relationships as friendship, and the second one is the exchange of information, the negotiation of statuses and social roles, as well as deciding on and carrying out joint actions. Van Els, et al (1977: 266) mention that dialogues have acquired a prominent place as a means of presentation. Dialogue allows the teacher to present new language material functionally in a communicative situation, which makes it easier for learners to grasp the new material.

4. Information Gap Activities

As discussed in part one of the principle tenets of the communicative approach to language teaching is that the learners are involved in actual interaction in the classroom.This interaction must be meaningful and involved an authentic use of language (Basturkmen, 1994: 50). To help students develop their communicative efficiency in speaking, there are some activities used in the classroom to promote the development of speaking skills of our learners.

4.1 The meaning of Gap

Harmer (1991:48) defines information gap as "gap" between the two persons in the information they possess, and the conversation helps to close that gap so that now both speakers have the same information. Hedge (2000:58) defines information-gap activity as one which 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 from the decoding or encoding of information from or into language.

4.2 Types of Information

The information involved in the gap can be of two types supplied-to- the learner and supplied –by-the learner.

A. Supplied –to- the learner

This kind usually discussed in the literature on information gap, is when the gap is created by giving one or more group members information which others do not have. An example could involve giving one person one version of a picture, giving another version of the same picture to their partner, and asking them to identify the differences between the two pictures. This activity is called spot the difference (Susanti, 2007:12).

B. Supplied –by-the- learner

Information gaps are those which exist because of unique information which learners already posses. Asking students to

interview each other about their families would be an example of unique information which learners supply from knowledge them already posses (Jacobs, 1998:4).

4.3 Definition of Information Gap Activities

Nunan (2001: 309) defines information gap as "pair or group work tasks in which participants have access to different information. In order to complete the task, the information must be exchanged".One of the principles underlying communicative methodology is messege-focus. This has given rise to activities which simulate real communication by involving the exchange of information or opinion between participants (Johnson and Johnson, 1998: 166). In a gap–filling activity, each learner in a pair or group of learners holds information which is partial, or different from that of their partner(s). The task involves conveying information - opinions not already know to the other participant(s)(Littlewood,1989: 33).   According to Ur (1996: 281) an interesting type of task is that based on the need to understand or transmit information, finding out what is in a partner's picture, for example. Variation on this is the opinion gap where participants exchange views on the given issue. While, Harmer (1991:48) defines information gap as "gap" between the two persons in the information they possess, and the conversation helps to close that gap so that now both speakers have the same information. Each speaker in the conversation has information that the other speaker needs to know (Richards and et al, 1992: 179).

4.4 Preparing a Lesson Plan for Information Gap Activities

Teachers must be careful during preparing for a lesson plan, so they have to choose the most perfect ways to implement their lessons in   a successful way. Hopkins (2002: 52) mentions four stages for preparing   a lesson plan in the classroom; each of the phases can be explained briefly as follows:

A-Planning

In this phase, the teacher makes the lesson plan and then chooses the teaching aids to imply the information gap activity

in the form of dialogue, short paragraph, describe and draw material.

B- Acting

The teacher puts the class into five groups, calling them A, B, C, D, E. To each group he gives one of the pictures. The students in the groups have to memorize everything they can about the pictures-which is in them, what is happening etc. They can talk about the details in their groups. The teacher now takes the pictures and asks for one student from each group (A, B, C, D and E) to form a new five person group. He tells them that they have seen different pictures, but that the pictures taken together. The task is for the students to work out what the story is. The only way they can do this is by describing their pictures to each other and speculating on how they are connected.

C. Observing

In this phase, the teacher observes the student's response, participation and everything which is found during the teaching and learning process. In speaking learning process, most of the students will be interested in information gap method, and all of them will have the opportunity to speak.

D. Reflecting

After collecting the data, the teacher will evaluate the teaching- learning process. Then the teacher will evaluate her\himself by seeing the results of the observation, whether the teaching - learning process of speaking using information gap method is good to imply in a teaching -learning process. If the first plan is unsuccessful, the teacher should make the next plan (re-planning) to get good results (Harmer,2007:129).

3-0 Introductory Note

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the procedures that have been carried out in order to fulfill the aim of the study in terms of the following:

3-1 The design of the Experiment

This study follows the experimental design of pretest-posttest equivalent groups in which subjects are randomly assigned to experimental and control groups, and a pretest is administered before the application of the experimental and control treatments and a posttest at the end of the treatment period. This study was due to the nature of the research which aimed at finding the effectiveness of using cued-dialogue and information gap activities on developing speaking skills.

3.2 The Sample of the Study

A sample of (72) pupils from Al-Ghad-Al-Mushriq secondary school for boys has on purpose been chosen from the whole population of secondary schools in Baquba town (See table (3.1). The selection of the sample is limited to secondary schools for boys after dropping the secondary schools for girls and secondary schools for boys and girls in the Directorate General of Education in Diyala Governorate.

After visiting the school, it has been found that there are two sections for the fifth grade in the school, they are sections (A) and (B). One of these sections has randomly been selected to be the EG and the other one to be the CG.Section (A) included (36) pupils and section (B) included (36) pupils.The total number is 72 students.Section A is selected as the experimental group (EG) and section B as the control group (CG). All the above random selections are carried out by lot.Two students from B and one from A are excluded from the experiment because they are repeaters in this grade. The repeaters are kept in their classes during the period of the experiment. Thus the final number of the sample subjects is (69) students. See Tables (3.2).

TaTables 3.2 The Number of Subjects before and after Excluding the Repeaters

Group	Section	No.	Repeaters	Final No.
EG	A	36	1	35
CG	B	36	2	34
Total		72	3	69

3.3 The students' scores on the pre- test

To ensure that the sample subjects are equivalent in their previous English language proficiency, the researcher applied the oral speaking test before starting the experiment. The results of the subjects were recorded and statically analyzed by using "T" test. Table (3.6) Shows the mean and the standard deviation of each group in English previous learning. The results analyzed indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the experimental and the control groups at (0.05) level.

Table 3.6 The Mean, Standard Deviation and T-value of the Subjects' Achievement on the Pretest

Group	No.	M	SD	Df	T-value	
					Calculated	Tabulated
EG	35	15.7	4.15	67	0.15	1.99
CG		15.05	4.14			

3.4 Test Validity

One of the most important aspects which must be considered when selecting or constructing a test is its validity, which can be defined as "measuring the instrument appropriateness to meet the identified educational needs of the teacher"(Lado, 1964:50).While Harris (1969: 60) defines validity as "the extend to which it does

what is intended to do". According to McNamara (2000: 133) validity is "the extent to which a test meets the expectations of those involved in its use, e.g. administers, teachers, candidates and test score users."

Harris (1969:19) states that a test has face and content validity if it is designed to measure the mastery of a particular domain of study and is relevant to that domain.

3.4.1 Content Validity

In language tests, it is not enough to depend only on face validity to judge the suitability of a test. Content validity is also required to (a) make sure that the test adequately samples the material it is supposed to measure and (b) supply information about the nature of the test. Therefore, a careful analysis of the content is carried out to be a basis or a guide for writing test items. Al-Hamash et al. (1982:17) state that ''a test can be more valid if it is based on analysis of the content of the subject or skill we are testing".

3.4.2 Face Validity

Gronlund (1981:68) maintains that face validity is the outside or superficial appearance of the test, i.e., whether the test appears to teachers, educators and the like as an appropriate measuring device or not. Therefore, after preparing the initial form of the test, the researcher has submitted it to a jury of ten university lecturers who are specialized in TEFL. The jury members have been requested in a covering letter to decide on the appropriateness of the test items .The jury consisted of the following members whose names are arranged in alphabetical order: Some of the jury members have presented some invaluable suggestions which have been taken into full consideration by the researcher and his supervisor. Then the test was exposed to those members who made the proposed suggestions. After that all the jury members agreed that the test has become suitable for testing the language areas it is supposed to measure.

3-5 The pilot Administration of the Test

Before the test is formally administered, it should be tried out on a sample similar to those for whom the test is being designed. Such a step is usually referred to as **pilot study** (Harris, 1969: 103).After securing the validity of the test, a pilot study has been administrated empirically on a sample of (50) students which have not been involved in the experiment and control group.

The aims of this application are to:

1- Cheek the time that students need to fulfill the test,
2- Identify the discrimination power of the test items,
3- Determine the appropriate time required;
4- Discover how test takers respond to the test task; and
5- Find out the reliability of the test.

3.6 Reliability of the Test

Reliability is a quality of the test scores which refers to the consistency of measures across different items, test forms, and raters and other characteristics of measurement context (Lado, 1972:330).   Oller (1979:4)believes that "reliability provides consistency which secure validity and indicates how much confidence we can place in our results". According to Harmer (2001:322) a good test should give consistent results. In practice, reliability is enhanced by making the test instructions absolutely clear, restricting the scope for variety in the answers, and making sure that test conditions remain constant. Various methods can be used for estimating the test reliability such as: split-half,Cronbach Alpha, Kuder-Richardson, equivalent forms, and the test-retest .

4.0 Introductory Note

In this chapter, results are analysed in order to determine whether there is any difference between the achievement of the (EG) and that of the (CG). Comparisons are made between the means of the scores of those two groups in the oral test, recognition test, and production test. Finally, results are discussed.

4.1 Analysing the Results of the Oral Test

The results of the pupils' performance on the oral test reveal that the average score of the (EG) is (21.43) with a standard deviation (SD) of (3.77) which is higher than that of the (CG) which is (18.79) with an SD of (5.22). The difference between the two averages is statistically significant because the tabulated t-value is (1.99) at the P>0.05 and a df of (67) while the calculated value is (2.43). This indicates that there is a clear difference between the oral achievement of the (EG) and that of the (CG).Table (4) below shows the detailed descriptions of the results of both groups on the oral test.(See Table 4).

Table (4).The Pupils' Results on the Oral Test

Test	Group	No. of Pupils	Mean	SD	df	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value
Oral	EG	35	21.43	3.77	67	2.43	1.99
	CG	34	18.79	5.22			

4.2 Discussing the Results

The results prove the existence of a statistically significant difference between the achievement of the two groups in favour of the (EG). This indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected and that the alternative hypothesis should read: there is a statistically significant difference between the achievement of the (EG) and that of the (CG) in language performance. This indication, in fact, supports the researcher's impression made during the period of the experiment when the pupils of the (EG) exhibited an eagerness towards more progress in learning, increased their tendency to monitor their own work, compete among themselves to gain success, and sometimes made extra successful effort to modify their responses and to match the most acceptable behaviour.

It may be reasonable, here, to assume that the previous result is attributed to the effectiveness of cued-dialogue and information-gap activities in improving the pupils' ability in speaking.

4.3 Conclusions

The following points have been made on the basis of the findings indicated in 4-1

1-Cued-dialogue and informaton gap activities can better improve the students' interaction with the teacher and other students. When they were parcticing in pairwork and groupwork,all of them participated. This means students' participation in the class also improved. On the other hand, they decreased the amount of teacher taking time.

2- Cued-dialogue and information gap activities can maximize students' opportunities to speak during the English lesson and provide the potential benefits of student-student interaction. In order to elicit information and opinions from the teacher and friends, the students needed to interact among them. They should spend most of the time working in pairs and groups. The students have reasons to interact and tasks to fulfill.

3-Cued-dialogue and information gap activities encouage students' practice opportunities of the target language receptivity in the lessons as a result of presenting various task. In the light of students' reflections for the tasks used during the study,which were very positive, it showed that students were receptive to the idea of information gap and cued-dialogue activities while learning English .

4- Actually, language teachers can benefit from these techniques in order to educate more active students who are at the same time better communicators.

5-Cued-dialogue and informaton gap activities teach students how to concentrate on how to communicate the intended meaning not on the language forms.

4.4 Recommendations

In the light of the finding and the due literatture,The researcher recommends the following:

4.4.1 Recommendations to Curriculm Disigners and Decision Makers

1- To increase speaking proficiency, the syllabus of English curriculum should emphasis the productive skills of speaking. In dealing with a large number of students in Iraq classrooms. Pairwork and group work should be recommended in classroom instruction for all subject areas.

2-Information technology should be used in the classroom in variuos forms of activity, task or project. It can benefit language teaching such as films, radios, videws, which are available in many EFL settings, along with newspapers and magazines.These affordable sources enable the EFL students to increase their opportunities in learning to speak proficiency, including the provision of the internet interacting with native speakers on a variety of topics.

3-For teachers training, it is important to develop Iraqi teachers competencies to have opportunities to improve their English speaking proficiency as well as the other language skills.

4-The curriculum designers must consider continuity, sequence, and integration in building up their curricula and materials.

5-Speaking teachers need to be trained on how to develop and present dialogues for their students. The environment is also very important.

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