



Analysis of English-Speaking Proficiency Using the Information Gap Method Among First-Year and Second-Year BA English Major Students

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Abstract

Background and Aims: This study looks into how well students' English-speaking abilities can be improved using the Information Gap Method. It seeks to determine the method's advantages and drawbacks for promoting fluency and practical language use. Thus, the purposes of this study were: 1) to investigate the effectiveness of the Information Gap Method in enhancing the English-speaking proficiency of BA English major students, 2) to assess the potential of Information Gap Methods to learner fluency, vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and the ability to express oneself clearly, while also considering any impact on pronunciation, and 3) to compare the speaking development between first-year and second-year students.

Methodology: The research participants were first-year (n=19) and second-year (n=25) BA-English major students of Nakhon Phanom University, Thailand, utilizing cluster random sampling. The information gap method was implemented during a language course, and its impact was assessed through pre-tests and post-tests focusing on speaking skills.

Results: The research found that 1) the Information Gap Method positively and significantly impacted the student's English-speaking proficiency as both year groups demonstrated significant improvement. First-year students' average scores increased by 61.51% (from 14.16 to 23.58), while second-year students showed a 48.83% improvement (from 15.75 to 23.44). The paired-sample analyses confirmed statistically significant differences ($p < .001$) for both groups. 2) Furthermore, information gap activities demonstrated a notably greater positive impact on students' ability to express themselves clearly (21%) and fluency (19.2%) as shown by the scores of both first and second years. While other categories also showed improvement, these two areas exhibited the most significant gains. 3) These results indicated that information gap activities may be particularly effective in accelerating the development of speaking proficiency for first-year students as evidenced by their greater percentage improvement between the pre-test and post-test compared to the higher-scoring second-year students.

Conclusion: These findings proved that the information gap method can be valuable for developing English-speaking skills among BA English major students. The study suggested its potential for wider implementation in language education programs targeting speaking proficiency.

Keywords: English-Speaking Proficiency; Information Gap Method; Communicative Language Activities

Introduction

The English language holds a substantial role in today's world. It connects diverse cultures, allowing effective communication and collaboration, especially in business and commerce, science and technology, and many other fields. English has emerged as the most rapidly expanding language in this new generation, claiming the role of the global lingua franca that bridges the geographical and cultural divides between different regions. Its influence extends across diverse areas including science, engineering, technology, medicine, research, education, tourism, internet, and more (Rao, 2019). Proficiency in speaking English is an essential skill that learners around the world need. Moreover, the significance of learning English has become more evident as days go by. Apart from its communication use, proficiency in English provides opportunities, for innovation learning, and exploration. For English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the process of learning English signifies goals towards acquiring vital skills that can help them meet the challenges of the world today. Learning English is a widespread endeavor that represents the desire to interact with the larger global society, whether for personal, intellectual, or professional reasons (Neeley, 2017).

In a very competitive world, English proficiency has already been part of the qualifications in terms of career options and opportunities. English communication skills have become one of the fundamental requirements in a globalized world. For English major students of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) countries, speaking skills must be more apparent than the non-English majors. This gives the students a chance to exceed further than what is expected of them. To avoid



academic failures, a minimum level of proficiency is often needed and important. The academic success of an institution for English proficiency is anchored on using English as a mode of instruction (Graham, as cited in Wagner, 2016). Effective English speaking proficiency development is designed to foster learners' positive attitude and high motivation towards learning. This development is influenced by factors such as practical applications, teacher correction, communications-focused activities, and a positive classroom atmosphere (Jr. & Cerna, 2023). In certain ESL and EFL situations where traditional education is applied, the growth of students' speaking and listening skills is low since traditional education is focused more on reading, writing, and grammar. This is where the institutions contribute significantly to improving listening and speaking skills. To achieve and meet the needs of oral proficiency, these institutions often employ foreign teachers and advanced teaching methods (Zhao, 2019). Admittedly, no single teaching method guarantees optimal outcomes in the classroom. Each pedagogical approach presents its own unique set of challenges for instructors to navigate. Learners need speaking skills to facilitate a creative and thoughtful conversation with the target language. Similarly, it is a multifaceted skill that hinges on careful and detailed planning to effectively execute within the classroom setting. Therefore, teaching spoken language presents challenges for both learners and instructors due to limited and unclear methods for oral communication instruction (Demiröz, 2023).

In Thailand, where the demand for the English language is progressing faster, the education system applies various methods suitable for learners. In addition, in the context of language education in Thailand, learner-centered methods such as hands-on training, self-directed projects, independent learning, and self-access should be more encouraged than traditional methods such as teacher-centered ones, and communicative language teaching (CLT) should be applied in the classrooms because, in Thailand, speaking skills are a crucial part of language learning and the teaching process (Chanaroke & Niemprapan, 2019). Communicative activities serve as a critical factor in fostering the development of speaking proficiency in the language learning environment. The goal of communicative activities is to get students to communicate with one another instead of practicing their language skills alone. Thamarana (2015) cites Littlewood as stating that the goal of these exercises is to create authentic and meaningful communication at all levels, putting more of a focus on abilities than on processes. Thus, CLT fosters genuine communication among students, or between students and their teacher, and it hinges on the existence of an information disparity. Significantly, one of the methods in the communicative approach is the information gap method. It is a widely recognized approach to promote active communication and language production. It involves creating situations where one individual possesses certain information that another individual does not, thus helping communication to bridge the gap. The value of the information gap exercises was emphasized in teaching speaking skills, in which two speakers must discuss and exchange various pieces of information to finish a task. Practicing speaking using information gap activities, particularly conversation via pair-work increases students' motivation towards learning English. Furthermore, mastering English speaking skills is vital for pursuing higher education and engaging in cross-cultural communication. Information gap activities in the context of EFL are recognized as an effective method in improving students' communicative competence and their abilities in real-life scenarios hence the activities are designed to stimulate practical settings that enhance students' critical thinking to exchange information to complete the given task (Amalia, 2019).

In the past, Thai EFL teachers used grammar-translation and audiolingual methods in the English classroom. The current state of English language education in Thailand faces significant challenges, leading to limited success. Inappropriate teaching techniques employed by educators, combined with students' reluctance to speak or speak softly to evade embarrassment, contribute to this issue. Moreover, the lack of active student engagement in learning activities, which predominantly focus on prescribed usage rather than practical application, further diminishes students' interest in the subject. Despite a focus on equipping BA English major students with strong speaking skills, traditional methods may not always maximize speaking practice and development (Chaiyasuk et al, 2013).

The primary focus of the research problem on students' English-speaking proficiency using the Information Gap Method is the difficulty of efficiently acquiring oral communication skills in a second language. Even with conventional teaching methods, many students find it difficult to communicate clearly and confidently in everyday settings. One possible remedy is the Information Gap Method, which has students engage in communicative activities to exchange knowledge that their partners are lacking. Nevertheless, not enough research has been done on how well this approach works to improve students' English-speaking ability, especially in multicultural classroom environments. This study attempts to





explore how the Information Gap Method can improve speaking abilities, pointing out both its advantages and disadvantages in terms of encouraging students' fluency and practical language use.

This study investigates the potential of information gap activities, a communicative approach that fosters interaction and information exchange (Thamarana, 2015, citing Littlewood), to enhance speaking skills among first-year and second-year BA English majors at Nakhon Phanom University. Specifically, the research aims to assess the effectiveness of these activities in improving fluency, explore their impact on vocabulary use, grammar accuracy, and clarity of expression and pronunciation, and compare the speaking development between first-year and second-year students.

Literature Review

Developing English proficiency is critical to language education, particularly for BA English major students. Hence, speaking skills may enable effective communication and enhance the cognitive processes and cultural understanding of its speakers. This literature review aims to explore the efficacy of the Information Gap Method in developing English-speaking proficiency among first-year and second-year BA English major students. The goal is to highlight effective strategies and identify gaps in existing research to inform future pedagogical practices and enhance language instruction in higher education.

From the perspective of learning a second language, speaking proficiency is an essential component of effective communication. Moreover, it is crucial for university students since it impacts their academic performance, social integration, and future career opportunities. The scope of the skill is wide and comprises different competencies such as linguistic, strategic, and sociolinguistic skills, and is essential for academic, professional, and social interactions. The development of speaking proficiency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) English major students is significantly influenced by the implementation of diverse, targeted teaching strategies. These strategies, utilized by instructors, aim to create a dynamic and engaging classroom environment that fosters motivation and immersion in the English language. Thus, EFL instructors leveraged a variety of unique techniques to cultivate speaking skills, enhance student motivation, and promote an English-speaking atmosphere both within and beyond the classroom (Abadi, 2015). Correspondingly, speaking proficiency is challenging to assess because of its evolving state and the need to control for variables such as tasks, raters, and interlocutors (Fan, & Yan, 2020). Building on Mashwani, & Noori, (2023) findings on English major students' attitudes toward native-like proficiency in the English language shows that Afghan English major students have highly positive attitudes towards native-like proficiency in the English language, believing that native speakers have better skills and the right to standardize the language. Similarly, Dilnoza, (2021) stresses that in enhancing English speaking skills in EFL/ ESL classrooms, one must possess effective teaching methods and approaches. English communication skills are one of the key factors to consider in leading better employment opportunities in different sectors. Moreover, having a good command of English is beneficial in capitalizing on employment possibilities in the future.

The ability to communicate effectively in English is crucial for academic and professional success. However, research indicates that Thai university students, particularly those with low proficiency, often struggle with English communication strategies. Students may have difficulty selecting appropriate strategies for different communicative contexts, which can impede their oral communication abilities. Additionally, some common mistakes made by Thai students include issues with pronunciation, stress, intonation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and interactive communication (Suciati, 2020). Conversely, these challenges point to the need for effective interventions to improve the speaking proficiency of Thai English major students (Islam & Stapa, 2021).

In an attempt to provide a well-rounded English language education and to show their commitment to students' learning, Thailand employed a teaching style that switches between Thai and Native English instructors. This method might help students learn both how to use English in real-life situations and the proper grammar rules, furthermore this approach has the potential to cover a wider range of language learning needs. For Thai students pursuing a major in English for Business Management, it underscores the critical role of English proficiency at the tertiary education level, creating a solid foundation in the English language (Nithideechaiwarachok et al., 2022). Thai university students use both English and Thai language. They value Thai for cultural reasons and while seeing English as an important global opportunity. The research highlighting the importance of spoken English in diverse contexts impacts English communication skills to access employment opportunities in various fields across the globe (Hayes, 2016). Several studies (Leonita et al., 2023; Ratnasari, 2020; Syahfutra et al., 2019) highlight the challenges Thai learners face in



developing speaking skills. These include limited vocabulary, grammatical shortcomings, and a lack of confidence stemming from factors like fear of error, nervousness, and an unsupportive environment.

Speaking is one of the essential skills as it provides learners with opportunities to engage with the target language vocally. On the other hand, the traditional method of teaching speaking skills could not make the learners reach their potential as it can be limited by the scarcity and ambiguity of pedagogies, especially in the transfer of skills for oral communication. Consequently, using a combination of different approaches can effectively teach speaking skills in English as a foreign language, making the gap between theory and practice closer (Demiröz, 2023). Hobs, (2018) views the traditional language teaching approach such as speaking as a transient, simple skill, and not worth teaching time, while the communicative approach does the exact opposite, it expresses the intricacy and benefits of language learning. Communicative approaches to language teaching value speaking as a complex, intricate skill that requires training for instinctive and natural language learning, transforming its status from undervalued to highly valued. Bouzar, (2019) also supported the idea that traditional methods of teaching speaking to EFL learners can be limited by the learner's lack of confidence and difficulty in mastering the language and that teaching speaking to EFL learners requires consciousness-raising strategies and oral error correction, which require both teacher and learner support.

Some of the obstacles teachers face in teaching speaking to Thai learners are students disturbing others, ignoring the learning process, bullying, and lacking vocabulary (Maryanti, Gani, & Marhaban, 2021). In a study conducted by Fadhilah and Nuraeni (2019), it was found that non-native English teachers in Southern Thailand employ diverse strategies, such as audio-lingual methods, communicative language teaching, games, group work, and intrinsic methods, to successfully facilitate English-speaking instruction for learners. However, teaching English speaking skills to language learners entails particular challenges, notably differences in language and cultural shock between students and teachers. Non-native English teachers underscored the significance of patience in managing learners' behavior throughout the English teaching and learning journey.

Building strong communication skills is paramount for Thai university students majoring in English for International Communication (Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011). These students face unique challenges in face-to-face conversations, often employing two main categories of strategies: continuous interaction and discontinuous interaction. This finding aligns with the emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods, which are recognized as crucial for fostering language acquisition, particularly in contexts where English is a Foreign Language (EFL). Communicative Language Teaching improves students' skills in responding to compliments in Standard American English, while also providing opportunities to practice other English skills (Pongsirjan et al, 2019). The key principles of Communicative Language Teaching include focusing on students' communication abilities and promoting real progress in mastering a foreign language. (Shimchuk, 2021). However, traditional classroom settings can sometimes limit spontaneous interaction and practice opportunities.

And in the realm of language learning methodologies, information gap activities play a crucial role. In a collaborative classroom action research project conducted using the information gap activities, the results showed significant improvement in speaking test scores, positive student engagement during the activities, and a favorable student perception towards the technique. It presents knowledge gap exercises as a potentially effective way to improve speaking abilities (Masluha, 2023). Some British educators anchored the idea of information gap activities in practical and authentic communication. The information gap activities suggest interaction among peers effectively and in a language classroom, it teaches both the macro skills and the art of discourse by gathering information. Several studies have explored the effectiveness of Information Gap Activities in enhancing speaking skills among EFL learners (Lanovastia et al., 2017). The study found that most students responded positively to information gap activities, reporting that they found them helpful, motivating, and engaging. In line with this, a study by Rahimi, (2016) on the effectiveness of the information gap technique in improving students' speaking skills also found that the method led to a significant improvement in speaking fluency among EFL learners, thus suggesting that the information gap technique is an effective method for enhancing speaking skills. Similarly, Amalia, (2019) iterated that information gap activities, particularly pair work, effectively improve students' English-speaking skills and increase their motivation to learn and use English in real-life situations. Amalia emphasizes that information gap activities facilitated speaking practice for students, the pair-work conversations were most enjoyed by the students because they exposed new ideas, increased speaking opportunities, and enhanced motivation. Ismaili and Bajrami, (2016) added that information gap activities effectively improve elementary students'

speaking skills, increasing their confidence, enthusiasm, and motivation for learning and using the language. The implementation of the information gap activities designed for short sentences and specific language points led to an increase in student confidence in speaking English as well as their enthusiasm and motivation for learning and using English. Adding information gap activities to an English class helps develop students' excitement to participate. Their confidence improves as well as their motivation which in turn assists the teacher in their class and also keeps students' retention. The impact of using information gap activities provides willingness of students to speak and because of its effectiveness on the student's language learning, it is deemed a valuable strategy that benefits both the students and the teacher (Humaera, Jumiaty, & Safei, 2022).

In summary, the literature study indicates that information gap activities can serve as a useful instrument for developing EFL learners' communication abilities. Studies have shown that the activities can increase students' willingness to communicate, especially their intention to initiate and participate in conversations. Furthermore, it seems that the exercises increase students' confidence and motivation to communicate by sharing information. Overall, the positive findings suggest that information gap activities should receive intensive application as a strategy to enhance English-speaking proficiency in EFL classrooms.

Conceptual Framework

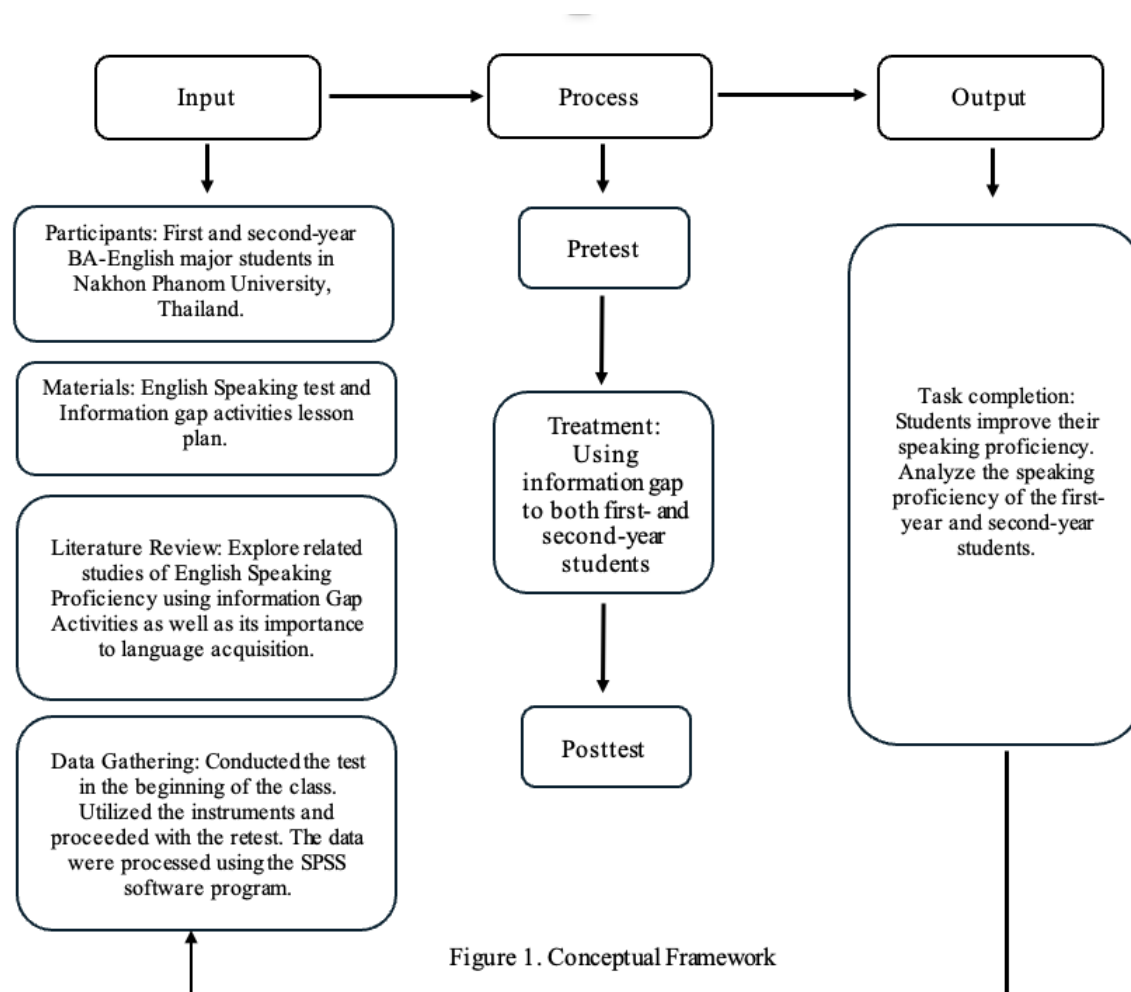


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



Methodology

This study used the quantitative method using a one-tail pretest-posttest design to analyze the effects of the English proficiency of the first-year and second-year BA-English students before and after using information gap activities. This includes the research population, instruments, data collection, and analysis.

Research Population: The population for this study was 44 BA-English major students studying at Nakhon Phanom University in Thailand. 19 students of which were first-year and 25 second-year students. The participants were chosen via cluster random sampling.

Research Instrument: There were 3 main instruments used in this study, they were:

1. 10 pretest-posttest speaking questions with 2 flashcard photos.
2. Four main topics including describing people and things, giving opinions, retelling a story, and reporting and advertising. Three lesson plans using the information gap method with jigsaw activities, picture descriptions, and introducing characters, were devised on each topic for a total of 12 lesson plans, one plan per week.
3. A speaking assessment form, based on Hughes, was modified to include five components: understanding, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Hughes, 2003).

Data Collection and Analysis

1. Students underwent the pretest assessment to gauge their speaking proficiency.
2. Within an English classroom comprising 44 students, 12 lesson plans featuring information gap activities were implemented as the treatment.
3. Following the utilization of the information gap method, a posttest assessment was administered using the same questions as the pretest.
4. The data was processed and subjected to statistical analysis using the SPSS program.
5. The pre-test and post-test results were examined utilizing mean, averages, standard deviations, percentages, and dependent t-tests.

Result

The section shows the results and analysis of the students' English-speaking proficiency using the information gap method. The participants of the study were 19 first-year and 25 second-year BA-English major students of Nakhon Phanom University in the first semester of the academic year 2023. The results were presented as follows:

Table 1 First-year BA-English major students pretest and post-test Speaking test scores in percentage.

Skills	1) Pronunciation	2) grammar	3) vocabulary	4) fluency	5) Expression
Pretest	27.3%	26.8%	28.9%	26.8%	32.6%
Posttest	43.1%	46.8%	44.7%	47.3%	53.6%
Percentage diff.	15.8%	20%	15.8%	20.5%	21%

Table 1 presents the breakdown of speaking skills assessed in the pretest and posttest for first-year BA English students at Nakhon Phanom University. The speaking test evaluated five categories: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and expression. In the pronunciation category, students achieved 27.3% on the pretest and 43.1% on the posttest, reflecting a statistically significant increase of 15.8 percentage points. Similar improvements were observed in grammar (26.8% pretest, 46.8% posttest; 20.0% increase) and vocabulary (28.9% pretest, 44.7% posttest; 15.8% increase). Fluency also showed significant enhancement (26.8% pretest, 47.3% posttest; 20.5% increase). Notably, the expression category displayed the most substantial improvement (32.6% pretest, 53.6% posttest; 21.0% increase). Collectively, these findings demonstrate a substantial enhancement in the students' speaking proficiency after employing information gap activities.

Table 2 Second-year BA-English major students pretest and post-test Speaking test scores in percentage.

Skills	1) Pronunciation	2) grammar	3) vocabulary	4) fluency	5) Expression
Pretest	31.2%	31.6%	29.6%	29.2%	35.2%
Posttest	45.2%	46%	46%	48.4%	49.6%
Percentage diff.	14%	14.4%	16.4%	19.2%	14.4%

Table 2 presents the pretest-posttest scores of second-year BA English students at Nakhon Phanom University. The data compares performance on a speaking test divided into five categories: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and expression. Students took the test before and after instruction, involving information gap activities. The results reveal significant improvement across all categories. The highest increase was in fluency (19.2%), followed by vocabulary (16.4%) and grammar and expression (14.4%). While pronunciation saw the smallest improvement (14%), it was still statistically significant. Overall, these findings suggest that the implemented instruction method effectively enhanced the students' speaking proficiency.

Table 3 The comparison of pretest-posttest scores of the first-year BA-English students

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest Speaking	14.16	19	3.484	.799
	Posttest Speaking	23.58	19	5.853	1.343

Table 3 shows the pretest and posttest results of the first-year BA-English major students. 19 students participated in the study and got a total pretest mean score of 14.16 with a standard deviation of 3.484. The posttest mean score was 23.58 and a standard deviation of 5.853. The students' speaking post-test score is higher than the pretest score, which means that the students' speaking proficiency improved after using the information gap.

Table 4 The comparison of achievements of first-year BA-English students

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					Significance		
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	
					Lower	Upper			One-Sided p Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Pretest Speaking - Posttest Speaking	-9.421	3.731	.856	-11.220	-7.623	-11.005	18	<.001 <.001

Table 4 shows the comparison of the pretest-posttest scores before and after using the information gap method. The mean difference is at -9.421 with a standard deviation of 3.731. The t-test score is at -11.005 with a significance level of .001 respectively.

Table 5 The comparison of pretest-posttest scores of the second-year BA-English students

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest speaking	15.76	25	3.908	.782
	Posttest Speaking	23.44	25	5.679	1.136

Table 5 presents the results of the second-year students' pretest-posttest using the same method as the first-year students. The total pretest speaking mean score is 15.76. The standard deviation is at 3.908. The post-test speaking mean score is 23.44 with a standard deviation of 5.679. The second-year students' posttest score is relatively higher than the pretest score.

Table 6 The comparison of achievements of second-year BA-English students

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences				Significance			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	
					Lower	Upper			One-Sided p Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Pretest speaking - Posttest Speaking	-7.680	3.412	.682	-9.089	-6.271	-11.254	24	<.001 <.001

Table 6 shows the difference in the mean, standard deviation, t-test result, and the significance value of the speaking pretest-posttest of second-year students. The total mean difference is at -7.680 and a standard deviation of 3.412. The t-test score is at -11.245 with a significance level of .001.

Table 7 Comparison of scores of the first-year and second-year BA-English students

Comparison of scores of the first-year and second-year BA-English students	First-year students (N=19)		Second-year students N=25	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Mean	14.16	23.58	15.76	23.44
Standard deviation	3.484	5.853	3.908	5.679
t-test	-11.005		-11.254	
Percentage	61.51%		48.83%	

Table 7 shows the results of both first- and second-year BA-English students. The first-year students' pretest mean score was 14.16 with a standard deviation of 3.484, while the second-year students got a pretest mean score of 15.76 with a standard deviation of 3.908. The posttest mean scores of both the first- and second-year students were 23.58 and 23.44 with a standard deviation of 5.853 and 5.679. The t-test result of the first-year students was -11.005 while the second year got -11.254. The total percentage change of the first-year students was at 61.51% while the second-year students were at 48.83%.

Discussion

The study entitled Analysis of English-Speaking Proficiency Using the Information Gap Method Among First-Year and Second-Year BA English Major Students aimed 1) to investigate the potential of information gap activities, 2) to assess the effectiveness of these activities in improving fluency, explore their impact on vocabulary use, grammar accuracy, and clarity of expression and pronunciation, and 3) compare the speaking development between first-year and second-year students. The discussion, conclusion, and recommendation are as follows:

Assessing the effectiveness of Information Gap Activities to the first-year and second-year BA-English Students' English-speaking proficiency

First-year BA-English students at Nakhon Phanom University significantly improved their speaking proficiency across all categories between the pre-test and post-test. The most notable gains were in expression (21%), followed by fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. In comparison, the second-year students showed the most significant improvement in fluency (19.2%), followed by vocabulary, grammar, expression, and pronunciation. In addition, the standard deviation for both the first and second years increased from the pretest to the posttest, indicating a greater spread or variability in the posttest scores compared to the pretest scores. The t-test results for both years show a significant difference between the pretest and post-test scores, with negative t-values indicating a decrease in the mean scores. The increase in standard deviation from the pretest to the posttest, along with the significant t-test results,



suggests notable changes in the variability and mean scores between the pretest and posttest assessments for both years using the information gap. The reason behind this is that learners are forced to negotiate to mean and utilize the target language more naturally when there is a genuine need for communication and the sharing of unknown information. Similarly, the high improvement in expression suggests that the information gap method may have fostered critical thinking and diverse perspectives in students. Evidently, in the realm of human communication, expressions play a pivotal role in conveying the depth and nuance of thoughts and emotions. As the primary mode of interaction, speaking is often the first avenue through which we connect with others, and the way people express themselves can significantly impact the success of these exchanges. Moreover, subtle expressivity, such as variations in gaze, tone, and gesture, can subtly communicate internal states and intentions. Likewise, the attitude, culture, and leadership skills exhibited through expressions can greatly influence the effectiveness of communication (Akhter et al., 2020). In addition, by using concise, simple, and direct language, and being attentive to the emotions of the other party, speakers can enhance the clarity and impact of their message. These factors also contribute to fluency (20.5%) and grammatical accuracy (20%), which further enhance the overall effectiveness of communication. The ability to speak a language fluently and with proper grammar is a crucial aspect of effective communication. While some scholars argue that grammatical knowledge is not as important in language learning, there is a strong case for the significance of grammar in enabling learners to use the target language precisely, productively, and creatively (Kanoksilapatham, 2022). In addition, both pronunciation and vocabulary (15.8%) showed positive development with the information gap method. Proper pronunciation is one of the most critical components of effective spoken communication, as it enables learners to express themselves clearly and be easily understood by their audience (Simanullang, 2018). Pronunciation instruction plays a significant role in the teaching of English as a second language, as the majority of ESL learners seek to speak native-like English (Simanullang, 2018). Learners must master phonological rules, sounds, and pronunciations, as well as stress, intonation, and pitch, to speak the English language easily and effectively (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Additionally, vocabulary knowledge is essential for successful communication. Vocabulary is one of the important factors in all language teaching; students must continually learn words as they learn structure and as they practice sound systems. Vocabulary knowledge is a critical factor in successful speaking, as it enables speakers to use the necessary structures and functions for understandable communication.

The observed gains across categories suggest the effectiveness of the information gap method. This approach can be effective in enhancing speaking skills, as it encourages learners to engage in authentic communication and negotiate meaning. In communicative language education approaches, the information gap principle has gained widespread use as a means of fostering meaningful engagement among students, and as a result, the percentage change in scores indicates substantial improvements from the pretest to the posttest, particularly in the first-year, indicating a more substantial improvement in performance following the information gap methods. Information gap activities have been widely recognized as a useful tool for developing speaking skills in language learning (Derakhshan et al., 2016). These activities involve a situation where one learner has information that the other learner does not, and they must communicate to share and obtain the missing information (Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019). Recent research has highlighted the benefits of information gap activities, as they can reflect authentic communication and promote the use of various language resources, including vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies. Classroom interaction, both between teachers and learners as well as among learners, is also crucial in promoting speaking development, as it allows for the negotiation of meaning and the provision of feedback. Successful EFL learners often employ a variety of strategies to improve their speaking skills, including mentally preparing, increasing vocabulary, and engaging in frequent practice (Mbani et al., 2023). The information gap method can be a valuable tool in this context, as it provides a structured opportunity for learners to apply these strategies in a communicative setting.

Comparing the speaking development between first-year and second-year students.

The first-year students demonstrated a substantial improvement in their English-speaking proficiency after using the information gap method. The posttest scores showed a significant increase compared to the pretest scores, with a percentage change of 66.53%. The t-test result of -11.005, combined with the stringent significance level of .001, indicates a highly significant improvement in English-speaking proficiency for first-year students. After using the information gap strategy, the second-year students also showed improvements in their English-speaking abilities. The percentage change between the pretest and posttest



scores was 48.73%, indicating a significant gain. The second-year students' English-speaking proficiency appears to have improved statistically, as indicated by the t-test result of -11.254 and the significance level of .001.

The information gap method demonstrably improved all aspects of speaking proficiency for both first and second-year students. However, first-year students generally saw greater gains across all categories. For instance, in pronunciation, first-year students improved by 15.8% compared to the second year's 14.4% gain. Similarly, first-year students achieved a 20% increase in grammar, while second-year students' improvement was 16.4%. The pattern continued for fluency and expression, with first-year students achieving 20.5% and 21% improvements, respectively, compared to the second year's 19.2% and 14.4%.

Interestingly, despite starting with lower scores on the pre-test and post-test compared to the second-year students, the first-year group demonstrated a more significant improvement following the information gap method. While the second-year students got higher pre-test and post-test scores, the first-year group made greater gains after using the information gap method. The information gap method led to a more pronounced improvement for first-year students compared to the second-year group, even though the first-year students started with lower scores. The information gap strategy had a positive impact on the English-speaking competence of both first-year and second-year students. The significance level and the t-test results offer compelling evidence of the information gap method's efficacy in improving both groups' English-speaking abilities. To complete the information gap task, students must therefore put their speaking proficiency in the target language to use. It is anticipated that sufficient opportunities will be given for students to talk for extended periods in the target language, allowing them to naturally improve their speaking abilities. Limited exposure to English in rural areas presents a significant hurdle for EFL learners struggling to develop their speaking skills (Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020). The Information Gap Method (IGM) emerges as a potentially crucial solution to this challenge, with its proven effectiveness in various educational settings.

While there is evidence that information gap activities can benefit English language learners, more research is needed to fully understand their impact on the speaking proficiency of Thai students specifically. Additional studies should examine the specific communication strategies developed through such activities and how they relate to overall speaking ability.

Conclusion

The information gap method demonstrably improved the English-speaking proficiency of both first-year and second-year students. Notably, the gains were statistically significant, suggesting a genuine impact on their speaking abilities. This method appears to be particularly beneficial for first-year students, who exhibited a higher percentage increase in their scores compared to their second-year counterparts. However, it's important to acknowledge that second-year students still achieved higher overall scores despite the smaller percentage change. Interestingly, while all assessed categories – grammar, pronunciation, fluency, expression, and vocabulary – showed improvement, both year levels demonstrated the most significant gains in fluency and expression. This suggests that the information gap method effectively fostered students' ability to communicate smoothly and articulately.

Recommendation

Recommendations for further studies are as follows:

1. Subsequent research may concentrate on expanding on the outcomes of the present study, exploring in greater detail, particularly the information gap method and its influence on English language competency.
2. Future research should address the limitations of this study by improving the methodology, increasing the sample size, or considering other factors that could affect the ability to speak English fluently.
3. Similar studies in other settings, countries, or cultures may provide insightful information on how broadly the results can be applied using the information gap method's efficacy in a variety of educational settings.





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