

The Contribution of Information Gap Activities to Support Honduran Ninth-grade Students' speaking Fluency: Action Research¹

La Contribución de las Actividades con Vacío de Información para Apoyar la Fluidez del Habla de los Estudiantes Hondureños de Noveno Grado.

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Abstract

This article presents the process and results of an action research project which explored the contribution of information gap activities to support a group Honduran ninth-graders' speaking fluency. Their speaking fluency was assessed in terms of speech rate, breakdowns or pauses, and repairs. This study adopted a mixed method approach: quantitative and qualitative. The sample chosen was a purposive sample made up of a group of seven ninth graders who had been learning English in rural context in a public high school in Comayagua for two years, all aged between 14 and 15 years old, with a basic level of English. The information gap technique was implemented during seven sessions following the regular topics scheduled for the school term. Data were collected by applying a pre-test and a post-test to assess students' fluency, and results were assessed with an analytic rubric; and their perceptions were assessed by a focus group. The pre and post-test results showed an improvement in participants' speaking fluency, and these results were in agreement with their positive perceptions. Moreover, participants expressed that information gap activities had impacted positively their motivation and their awareness of mistakes. In conclusion, information gap activities helped learners improve their speaking fluency and might support English teachers in Honduran rural public contexts not to rely upon traditional textbook use and make their classes more motivating and communicative.

Keywords: breakdowns, information gap activities, repairs, speaking fluency, speech rate, teaching speaking.

Resumen

Este artículo corresponde a una investigación-acción que exploró la contribución de las actividades de vacío de información para apoyar la fluidez del habla en un grupo de estudiantes hondureños de noveno grado. La fluidez del habla de los participantes se evaluó en términos de la velocidad, las interrupciones o pausas y reparaciones. Este estudio adoptó un enfoque metodológico mixto: cuantitativo y cualitativo. La muestra elegida fue un muestreo intencional o por juicio, formado por un grupo de siete estudiantes de noveno grado que llevan dos años aprendiendo inglés, todos en edades comprendidas entre los 14 y 15 años, con un nivel de inglés básico. Estos estudiantes provienen de una escuela secundaria pública rural en el municipio de Comayagua, Honduras. La técnica de las actividades con vacío de información se implementó durante siete sesiones abordando los temas regulares programados para el período académico. Los datos fueron recolectados mediante la aplicación de un pre-test y un post-test para evaluar la fluidez, y los resultados fueron evaluados con una rúbrica analítica; y para recoger las percepciones de los participantes se realizó un grupo focal. Los resultados del pre y post-test mostraron una mejora en la fluidez de habla de los estudiantes, y estos resultados mostraron correspondencia con sus percepciones positivas. Además, los participantes manifestaron que estas actividades impactaron positivamente en su motivación y en su toma de conciencia de los errores. En conclusión, las actividades de vacío de información ayudaron a los estudiantes a mejorar su fluidez al hablar, y este hallazgo permite ayudar a los maestros hondureños de inglés en contextos públicos rurales a no depender exclusivamente de los textos de estudio y a diseñar clases más comunicativas y motivadoras.

Palabras Claves: pausas, actividades de vacío de información, reparos, fluidez oral, velocidad de discurso, enseñanza del habla.

Resumo

Esta pesquisa autoetnográfica colaborativa explora a trajetória de construção da identidade de um grupo de três pesquisadores professores de inglês, assim como as repercussões que esses processos tiveram na implementação de uma percepção crítica e decolonial em relação ao campo de ensino de línguas (ELT). Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, os professores de inglês envolvidos nesta autoetnografia colaborativa compartilharam suas experiências, crenças e influências para examinar coletivamente como esses elementos influenciaram suas identidades profissionais em evolução e sua compreensão crítica atual do campo. Em geral, o estudo revela que a autoetnografia colaborativa proporciona uma plataforma única para examinar a trajetória de identidade de indivíduos e estabelecer uma conexão entre o passado e o presente. Os resultados também destacam a interação entre experiências individuais, contextos socioculturais e práticas pedagógicas, promovendo uma compreensão mais profunda do desenvolvimento da identidade de pesquisador-professor de inglês. Ao enfatizar a importância da exploração coletiva, este estudo defende a incorporação mais ativa da autoetnografia colaborativa como uma ferramenta valiosa para o desenvolvimento profissional no ensino de inglês e pesquisa em geral, e na Colômbia em particular.

Palavras-chave: falhas, atividades de lacuna de informação, reparos, fluência na fala, taxa de fala, ensino da fala.

Introduction

The National Curriculum Design for Primary Education in Honduras (2003) has established some competencies that Honduran students are expected to achieve in English language learning at the end of their primary education (ninth grade) and it is stated that students should be able to show confidence and a favorable attitude towards oral communication, use English orally to meet their communication needs, for recreation, solving problems and for knowing themselves. They should be able to produce simple oral dialogic messages related to people and events in the immediate school environment. (Secretaría de Estado en el Despacho de Educación de Honduras, 2003, pp.61-62).

To achieve these goals, it is suggested the use of the task-based approach in class, which “emphasizes the processes of interaction in the classroom as an element for the collective construction of meaning and the linguistic system”. (Secretaría de Estado en el Despacho de Educación de Honduras, 2003, p.61)

Even though the Secretary of Education of Honduras [SEH] has set clear standards, the reality remains the same: “In many public schools, lack of resources and the indifference of educational authorities have left the teaching of English behind” (Pagoada, 2014, p.2) According to the same author, one of the reasons for this problematic situation is the lack of suitable resources. In Honduras, teachers just have the textbooks to teach English and unfortunately these are not very appropriate as they are strongly grammar-focused and in the lessons there are few opportunities for students to develop speaking activities or to promote their fluency. Students spend most of the time memorizing grammar rules. Therefore, teachers need to look for other resources to achieve the standards expected at the end of each grade.

As a result, English speaking fluency in the classroom is neglected as teachers do not have enough time to develop interactive speaking activities for the learners to use all the vocabulary and grammar they know; that is why this is a crucial language skill that requires improvement.

The teacher-researcher decided to address the criteria of speaking fluency after observing in her classroom that most of the students had problems when speaking in class, they barely said some short sentences, and they were not used to taking part in speaking activities during English classes. The main aim of this action research was to explore how the use of information gap activities in the English lessons could support these ninth graders’ speaking fluency. Particularly, the intervention developed had as the main focus to assess participants’ fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns, and repairs, and also to analyze their perceptions about the effectiveness of these activities. Taking into account that there is not much data related to the implementation of new and interactive strategies in the teaching of English in a public rural education context, this action research provides valuable and important insights in this field.

General Objective

To explore Honduran ninth-grade students' perceptions about their speaking fluency improvement in English through the use of information gap activities.

Specific Objectives

- To assess the contribution of information gap activities to support students' speaking fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns and repairs.
- To analyze students' perception regarding the use of information gap activities to support their speaking fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns and repairs.

Literature Review

Speaking Skill Development

There are different definitions about the speaking skill considering its several characteristics. Richards (2008) states that “speaking refers to the circumstances where the point is on what it is said or done. The message is the central focus alongside the interaction” (p.24). Jondeya (2011, p.15) states that “speaking is a skill of comprehending, pronouncing, and being fluent and accurate in using grammar and vocabulary”. According to Nunan (2003) “Speaking is a productive aural/ oral skill, and it consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning” (p.48). Based on all these definitions, it can be said that speaking is a complex productive skill that includes elements like conveying the message effectively by using vocabulary and grammar to transmit this message. One essential aspect of speaking is the social interaction it generates because when people speak, they are not only producing a set of words, but they are also sharing knowledge and in order to that they need to use many cognitive and social skills. As Putri (2014) remarks, “It is not merely speaking without any organization or ideas. It needs confidence and competence to build a good communication with others” (p.7). Undoubtedly, speaking includes a significant number of aspects that might make it one of the most challenging skills when learning or teaching a language but at the same time one of the most essential.

The challenge of developing the speaking skill in the EFL classroom

Teaching speaking should be the core of each EFL /ESL course in all educational institutions. Keeping this aim in mind, teachers should focus on developing more communicative activities in their lessons and give students more opportunities to use the language naturally and interactively to achieve a higher level of proficiency. In different contexts, English teachers feel this pressure to help students become fluent or proficient when speaking the language, so they constantly search for innovative teaching methodologies. Well- informed teachers equip students with the language they need to complete the different speaking tasks, hence students can achieve the expected outcomes. Nevertheless, the responsibility not only relies on teachers, students should also take the speaking practice opportunities seriously because speaking in a foreign language is a very difficult task, learners should not only acquire the essential grammatical rules or vocabulary in English, but they should also practice the language through communication in their social environment. (Namaziandost et. al, 2019)

Developing learners' speaking fluency

The speaking skill has different elements; some authors call them macro skills while other call them micro-skills. Harmer (2007) names them categories. He explains that “there are two speaking categories: accuracy, involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation; and fluency, considered to be ‘the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously” (p.112). For the purpose of this study, the second category will be considered: participants’ fluency.

Many learners consider themselves fluent in a language when they feel comfortable and confident when communicating or when they can take part in a conversation easily, but fluency goes beyond that.

When researchers study fluency, they use two fairly simple measurements; one is the rate of speech, how many syllables you produce over a given time, the second is the length of utterances, how many words you can produce in a continued string of speech without hesitation or pauses. (Jones, 2020, p.3)

Then, it can be said that fluency includes different dimensions, the quantitative dimension such as the number of syllables or length of utterances over a given time, and the qualitative dimension: how confident or comfortable a speaker is when using the language in a conversation in a daily life context. Tavakoli (2020) describes two kinds of fluency: utterance fluency and perceived fluency. “Utterance fluency relates to the measurable aspects of fluency; and perceived fluency represents the inferences listeners make about speakers’ cognitive fluency based on their perceptions of the speech that they hear.”(Tavakoli, 2020 p.170)

From the two areas described above, this action research study focused on utterance fluency because it encloses measurable aspects like the following:

- Speech rate: the number of words per minute for a speech sample.
- Fluency breakdown: the average length of pauses at the end of AS units.
- Repair: the number of strings in a speech sample that are repeated with some modifications to syntax, morphology, or word order, among others. (Skehan, 2009)

The role of Information Gap Activities to promote speaking fluency

To improve students' speaking fluency, one communicative activity that has gained fame because of its several advantages is the use of information gap activities. Larsen-Freeman (2003, p.65) states that "an information-gap task is a technique in which learners are missing the needed information to complete a task or solve a problem, and they have to communicate with their classmates to fill in the gaps". These kinds of activities are meaningful because they emulate what really happens in real life communication every day. "To complete the task, students must reduce or eliminate the information gap; the language is a tool, not an end in itself." (Decker, 2012, p.27)

It can be remarked that information gap activities give students the chance to share information while they are involved in reaching the same purpose. As Harris (1990) states, information gap is the best technique for second language learners; it can provide learners with a good opportunity to use the sentences they learn, it also allows learners to talk, exchange information, and interact over time, and the tasks will make the lesson more interesting and motivate the learner to speak more than their teacher.

Previous Studies about information gap activities as a collaborative learning strategy

Previous studies have shown that these activities allow students to talk and interact in a meaningful way. For instance, in recent research conducted by Rini (2017) after using information gap activities with a group of seventh-grade students, she concluded the participants had improved their speaking fluency better than those who were not exposed to information gap activities. In addition, Ortiz (2019) stated that after using information gap activities with a group of 23 eighth-graders students, information gap activities positively impacted students' oral fluency, allowing them to interact and use the language to communicate. Likewise, Linaanti (2017) conducted action research with 28 eighth graders who used information gap activities for almost a month; the findings of the research showed an improvement in participant's oral fluency.

Method

Type of Study

The present study corresponds to action research as it aims to act towards a situation that needed to be improved and at the same time produced new information. As Burns (2015) states: “Action research (AR) is a research approach that is grounded in practical action (the action component) while at the same time focused on generating theory (the research component). These two components work in combination” (p.1). In the present action research, the teacher-researcher noticed in her classes that her group of nine-year old students were not fluent in the use of the English language at the time of speaking. They hardly produced complete and coherent messages. To solve this problem, an intervention plan was designed, which involved the use of information gap activities in the English lessons to increase students’ engagement, their motivation and their talking time in real communication. A mixed method approach was adopted. A quantitative approach was used to compare the participants’ improvement in their language fluency through a pre-test and a post-test applied before and after the intervention; and a qualitative approach to analyze their perceptions about the experience.

Participants

The sampling for this study corresponds to a purposive sampling. “In this type of sampling, according to the purpose of the study, the members for a sample are selected. It is also called deliberate sampling” (Bhardwaj, 2019, p.161). The sample was made up of a group of seven ninth graders who had been learning English for two years with a grammar-focused methodology, with no time for developing interactive speaking activities. The participant’s ages ranged between 14 and 15 years old with a very basic level of English (they do not meet the standards established by the National Curriculum Design for Primary Education of Honduras for ninth grade). These students attend a public high school in a vulnerable context in Lamani, a town located in the central region of Honduras. In this context, the public education system does not give much importance to English teaching. Therefore, these students have been learning English for two years, two chronological hours a week.

At the time the intervention was conducted, they were in their third year of English language learning, but they struggled to produce short sentences, and they were not used to developing speaking activities in class.

Procedure

This study started as a piloting experience, in which the researcher had the opportunity to use the pre-test and measure how much language the participants

could produce in the activities planned and how much time they took to finish the task. The pre and post-test consisted of information gap activities designed with the content participants were learning in these months, such as asking and giving personal information, and expressing likes and dislikes. After the piloting, the researcher introduced the strategy by explaining key concepts related to the concept of fluency, such as fluency itself, speech rate, breakdowns, repairs, and the guidelines to use information gap activities.

When the participants were familiarized with these critical concepts, the researcher applied the pre-test to assess their initial level of fluency. After this, seven sessions using information gap activities following the regular ninth-grade topics were conducted. Then, the researcher applied the post-test to measure the participants' level of fluency after the intervention and their perceptions about the experience.

Data Analysis Tools

To analyze the quantitative data collected from the pre and post-test, the researcher used an analytic rubric that included three fluency aspects: speech rate, pauses, and repairs; descriptive statistics and measures of central tendency, particularly, the mean score, mean score difference, and standard deviation of the scores the participants got in the pre and post-test. The data obtained from the participants' perceptions through the focus group was video-recorded, and transcribed. The researcher coded the data identifying different categories following the thematic analysis stages suggested by Braun and Clark (2006): familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining, and naming.

Findings

The data gathered in this research are presented according to each specific objective defined for this action research.

SO1: To assess the use of information gap activities to support the student's speaking fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns, and repairs

To assess the usefulness of the information gap activities to improve learners' speaking fluency in terms of their speech rate, breakdowns or pauses, and repairs, the participants' mean scores, mean differences, and standard deviation were calculated in both the pre and the post-test. The maximum score in the analytic rubric used to evaluate students' fluency was 12 points. The participants' scores are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Scores, in the Pre and Post-test.

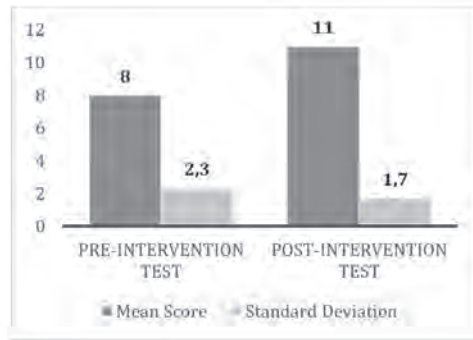
Participants	Fluency Level			
	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Score	Percentage of Achievement	Score	Percentage of Achievement
Student 1	4	33%	8	67%
Student 2	10	83%	12	100%
Student 3	10	83%	12	100%
Student 4	8	67%	9	75%
Student 5	7	58%	10	83%
Student 6	10	83%	12	100%
Student 7	10	83%	12	100%
Mean Score	8	67%	11	92%
Standard Deviation	2.3		1.7	

Source: Self-elaboration

As shown in Table 1, there was an improvement in the participants' speaking fluency after the intervention. It can be clearly observed in the post-test final mean score, which was 11 points, representing 92% of achievement compared with 67% of achievement in the pre-test with a mean score of 8 points. It can also be noticed that in the pre-test, none of the students achieved 100% of the task, but in the post-test, 4 students (50% of the participants) got a 100% of achievement. It is also important to highlight that the lowest improvement was 8% of achievement achieved by student 4. In conclusion, all participants showed an improvement in their fluency level.

Regarding the standard deviation of the pre-test reached 2.3. This standard deviation is high; thus, it demonstrates a low level of reliability in the pre-test results because there was a high variation among the participants' scores. The standard deviation of the post-test results is 1.7, which means that participants' scores were much closer to the media score which was 11. This low standard deviation indicates the data is reliable as the results are more homogenous. The mean score and standard deviation differences between the participants' fluency in the pre-test and the post-test are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Comparison of the mean score and standard deviation between the pre and post-test.



Source: Self-elaboration

To analyze more in-depth the participants’ improvement in their fluency level, it is necessary to look closely at each fluency aspect assessed. Table 2 shows participants’ speech rate scores.

Table 2. Pre and post-test individual scores and levels of speech rate

Participants	Speech Rate			
	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Score	Level	Score	Level
Student 1	2	Deficient	3	Very good
Student 2	3	Very good	4	Excellent
Student 3	3	Very good	4	Excellent
Student 4	2	Deficient	2	Deficient
Student 5	1	Poor	3	Very good
Student 6	3	Very good	4	Excellent
Student 7	3	Very good	4	Excellent
Mean Score	2.4	Deficient	3.4	Very good
Standard Deviation	0.8		0.8	

Source: Self-elaboration

As it can be observed in Table 3, most of the participants (86%) improved their level of speech rate in the post test because in the pre-test some of them were placed in

the “Poor” (14%) “Deficient” (29%) and some in the “Very Good” (57%) level of speech rate. Only student N° 4, did not show any difference in the speech rate level after the intervention being placed in the same category (Deficient). It can be said that students’ speech rate improved after the intervention, as the mean score from the pre-test was 2.4 (Deficient category), and the mean score from the post-test was 3.4 (Very Good category). It can also be observed that the results of the pre-test had a dispersion of 0.8 from the mean score of 2.4, which means that most of the students’ speech rates, before the intervention, were close to a “Deficient” level. The standard deviation from the post-test was 0.8 from the mean score of 3.4. Both standard deviations were very low, meaning there was not much variation in the scores, which shows a high degree of reliability in the data. Table 3 shows students’ scores in terms of their level of pauses or breakdowns.

Table 3. Pre and post-test individual scores and levels of pauses and breakdowns.

Participants	Pauses or Breakdowns			
	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Score	Level	Score	Level
Student 1	1	Poor	3	Very good
Student 2	3	Very good	4	Excellent
Student 3	3	Very good	4	Excellent
Student 4	2	Deficient	3	Very good
Student 5	3	Very good	3	Very good
Student 6	3	Very good	4	Excellent
Student 7	4	Excellent	4	Excellent
Mean Score	2.7	Very good	3.6	Excellent
Standard Deviation	0.9		0.5	

Source: Self-elaboration

In Table 3 it can be observed that the most common level of pauses in the pre-test was found in the descriptor “Very Good” with a 57% of achievement, also it can be noticed that only one student got the lowest grade or Poor level of pauses before the intervention. In contrast, in the post-test results, none of the students showed a Poor level of pauses; they all got a Very Good or Excellent level. The pre-test mean score was 2.7 points (Very Good level), and the post-test mean score was 3.6, which showed an improvement of 0.9 points. The dispersion of results of the pre-test was 0.9 points from the mean score, so the scores were not very dispersed from the mean score. Furthermore, the standard deviation from the post-test results was 0.5 points. If

compared to the standard deviations of both tests, there was a decrease of 0.4 during the post-test, which means that the participants' scores became even less spread, and closer to the mean score due to the improvement made in the post-intervention test.

The third fluency aspect evaluated was the level of repairs, which referred to the number of repeated sentences with modifications. Table 4 displays the learners' results in this aspect.

Table 4. Pre and post-test individual scores and levels of repairs.

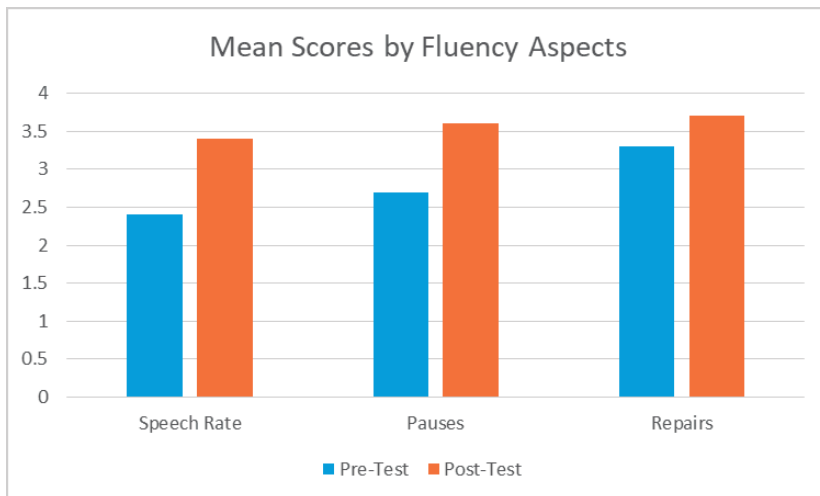
Participants	Repairs			
	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Score	Level	Score	Level
Student 1	1	Poor	2	Deficient
Student 2	4	Excellent	4	Excellent
Student 3	4	Excellent	4	Excellent
Student 4	4	Excellent	4	Excellent
Student 5	3	Very Good	4	Excellent
Student 6	4	Excellent	4	Excellent
Student 7	3	Very good	4	Excellent
Mean Score	3.3	Very good	3.7	Excellent
Standard Deviation	1.1			

Source: Self-elaboration

According to Table 7, most of the students demonstrated Excellent or Very Good initial level of repairs, this means they repeated the sentences with modifications very few times in the beginning. However, in the post-test, 90% of the students got the best score or showed an Excellent level of repairs. Regarding the mean scores, there was a small difference of 0.4 points between the pre and post-test, thus the pre-test mean score was 3.3 and the post-test mean score was 3.7. The dispersion of the results from the pre-test scores was 1.1 points, which is the aspect with the most dispersed results from the mean value; this implies that there was not a stable or consistent performance of participants in this aspect during the pre-test, which showed a low-reliability level. Furthermore, the standard deviation of the post-test results was 0.7 points. This standard deviation means the participants' scores became less spread and closer to the mean score.

The improvement in the three aspects assessed (speech rate, pauses or breakdowns, and repairs) is displayed in figure 3.

Figure 3. Comparison of mean scores of each fluency aspect assessed: Speech rate, breadowns and repairs.



Before the intervention participants showed a mean score that was placed in the Deficient descriptor in **speech rate**, which meant that they were not able to produce any sentence with evenness and flow; in terms of **breakdowns**, participants showed a mean score that corresponded to a Very Good level, in other words, their sentences were sometimes interrupted by pauses; in the **repairs** aspect, participants got a mean score that corresponded to a Very Good level so the sentences they produced were sometimes repeated with modifications. The aspect that demonstrated a greater improvement was **pauses or breakdowns**, and the aspect that showed the lowest improvement was **repairs**.

SO2: To analyze the learners' perception regarding the use of information gap activities to support their speaking fluency in terms of speech rate, breakdowns, and repairs.

To analyze participants' views about the process of using information gap activities to support their speaking fluency, a focus group was conducted in their mother tongue and the participants' opinions and perspectives on the topic were analyzed through a thematic analysis. Table 5 shows the thematic analysis of the students' perceptions gathered during the focus group.

Table 5. Thematic Analysis of the participants' perceptions of information gap activities.

Themes	Subthemes	Frequency
Information gap activities support in speaking fluency.	1. Improvement of the fluency level.	6
	2. No change in the fluency before and after the intervention	1
Contribution of information gap activities to improve participant's speech rate.	1. Improvement of the speech rate.	2
Contribution of information gap activities to improve participant's level of pauses or breakdows.	1.Improvement of the level of pauses	5
	2. No change in the level of pauses before and after the intervention.	1
Participants' awareness of mistakes using information gap activities	1. The were no repairs before because participants were not aware of the mistakes	7
	2. There were more repairs during the use IGA.	6
Appropriate time for the development of Information gap activities.	1. More time for developing the IGA.	4
	2. More time for both the presentation of the language and for the devolvement of the IGA	2
Use of information gap activities in the English Classes.	1. Increase of speaking time during English classes due to the use of information gap activities.	4
	2. There is more time to use the language communicatively when using IGA.	7
	3. Students' motivation about the use of IGA.	7

Source: Self-elaboration

The analysis of Figure 4 is addressed starting by the sub-themes with the most frequent answers, which were: "There is more time to use the language communicatively when using IGA", "Student's motivation about the use of IGA" and "There were no repairs before (the intervention) because participants were not aware of the mistakes". All the participants (7 participants, 100%) supported these ideas strongly. This showed that all of them agreed that using this technique during the English classes gave them the opportunity to interact with their classmates and learn at the same time, and this triggered their motivation. Even though motivation and the communicative use of the language were not strictly related to the objectives of the research, they emerged with a high level of frequency during the focus group.

The third sub-theme in which 100% of the participants agreed was related to the level of repairs: "There were no repairs before (the intervention) because participants

were not aware of the mistakes”. This theme might have emerged because participants could not compare if they had had more or fewer repairs before the intervention as they had never experienced this kind of oral interactive activity where they could identify their mistakes and correct themselves while speaking. In fact, this is portrayed in the pre-test results, which showed that the highest score (3.3) of the three aspects assessed was achieved in the level of repairs, meaning that students had very few repairs before the intervention.

According to the participants’ perceptions, the use of information gap activities helped them to improve their fluency level, 90% of them agreed that they had noticed a significant change all along the process of using information gap activities, which is evidenced in the results of the post-test. Regarding the speech rate, 28% of the participants expressed that they could speak faster or with a better flow than before the intervention, even though most of them (90%) improved their test scores in this aspect. In terms of the level of pauses or breakdowns, 71% of the participants expressed a contribution of information gap activities to their level of pauses or breakdowns. They said that they used to produce more pauses or breakdowns before the intervention, which is in agreement with the mean value difference registered in this aspect in the pre and post-test, that was 0.9.

Discussion

Data analysis results showed that information gap activities effectively helped the group of Honduran ninth-grade students to improve their speaking fluency level. This was observed in the results of the pre and post-intervention tests. The pre-test mean score was 8 out of 12, and in the post-test, the mean score was 11 out of 12; there was an improvement of 3 points.

To thoroughly analyze this improvement, it is necessary to consider the three aspects of fluency that were assessed: speech rate, pauses or breakdowns, and repairs. The most remarkable improvement was registered in the level of speech rate; thus, participants got an increment of 1 point of difference between the mean scores of the pre and post-test. In terms of pauses, there was an improvement of 0.9 points in the mean scores. Still, the best score after the intervention was in the level of repairs, as participants got a mean score of 3.7 out of 4, meaning that they had an excellent level of repairs after using information gap activities.

It can be said that after using information gap activities during a period, the ninth-grade students were able to produce sentences with a better speech rate, with fewer pauses, and repeating or modifying fewer sentences. These results are in line with what Ortiz (2019) concluded after conducting action research using information gap activities with 28 eighth graders; he affirmed information gap activities impacted

students' oral fluency, as they could produce utterances that were characterized by evenness and flow and with very occasionally hesitations and rephrasing. These results are also similar to the ones gathered by Rini (2017) and Linaanti (2017). They found that students' scores of fluency levels were higher in the post-test after using information gap activities in the intervention.

It is verified that information gap activities help to improve speech rate and reduce the number of repetitions of words, phrases, or clauses, and the number of lexico-syntactic reformulations for correction or repairs according to action research conducted by Namaziandost et al. (2019).

Regarding the participants' perceptions about the use of information gap activities as a support for their level of speaking fluency. The data gathered through the focus groups showed that their perceptions were in agreement with the quantitative results because 90% (6 answers) of them agreed that they had noticed an improvement in their fluency level after using information gap activities. In terms of pauses or breakdowns, 71% of the participants reported a reduction in the pauses after the intervention. However, in the aspect of speech rate, the students' perceptions differed from their results in the pre and post-test, because only 2 (28%) reported an improvement in their speech rate, even though 90% did improve their speech rate level in the post-test.

At the level of repairs, the participants provided some interesting opinions. They expressed that they did not have any level of repairs before the intervention, this might be due to the novelty of information gap activities because they have never experienced this kind of activity in which they could identify the mistakes and correct them while speaking. Therefore, a new benefit of using information gap activities arose "Getting awareness of mistakes "this perception was supported by 100% of the participants who agreed that before the intervention they were not aware of their mistakes and how to repair them. This result is supported by what Mumford and Darn (2020) said: When learners are motivated to speak, they produce more language, and they become "hypothesis testers" and "risk takers" thus they make more mistakes, but they are capable of self-correction.

Two other themes emerged during the focus group: "The communicative use of the languages through information gap activities" and "Students' motivation towards information gap activities". Some of them expressed that in class, before the intervention, they had not had opportunities to use the language communicatively as they just practiced the grammar rules in a written way. Information gap activities allowed them to use the grammar knowledge they already had in conversations instead of the traditional use of the textbook. When completing an information gap activity, students' conversations emulate what happens in an authentic context using English. As Prabhu, 1987 (as cited in Namaziandost, 2019,) stated, "information gap activities give the opportunity to work on negotiation meaning, enable learners to feel comfortable to speak, and increase communicative practice maximally." (p.13)

Regarding motivation, all of them strongly supported the idea that they felt more motivated in class using information gap activities. These perceptions were similar to the results got it by Humaera et al. (2022) in a recent study, in which the analysis revealed that “implementing information gap activities in the classroom while teaching English increased students’ willingness to communicate; they got motivated and confident to speak, they also improved their behavioral intention to communicate” (p.1)

Limitations

Some limitations were found during the implementation of this action research: for example, holding the intervention sessions online caused the main drawbacks to the development of the action plan, which were related to technical problems. Participants had a lot of connectivity issues and technical difficulties during the process.

There were also some challenges during the intervention. The first one was the fact that students took longer than expected to understand the instructions to complete the information gap activities. Considering this aspect, the researcher concluded that explaining the instructions is a key point for the effectiveness of this kind of activity.

Implications

Regardless of the limitations, some methodological implications are worth considering. To begin with, the information gap activities that were used during the intervention sessions were adapted following the regular topic proposed by the National Curriculum of Honduras for ninth graders. Therefore, information gap activities can be designed for each topic and thus be implemented in English classes in the context of the public system to reduce the grammatical focus and build a more interactive and communicative environment.

As a suggestion, because of the positive results evidenced, the National Secretariat of Education of Honduras could incorporate information gap activities to bolster the communicative and task-based approach suggested in the National Curriculum.

Conclusions

The use of information gap activities as a didactic strategy to improve the student's level of oral fluency is recommended based on the results of the pre and post-test, which demonstrated that after the intervention students improved their level of oral fluency by 3 points, getting in the final post-test a mean score of 11 out of 12 points, while in the pre-test they had only got 8 points.

In addition, information gap activities are suggested as a collaborative learning strategy based on the positive perceptions of participants, who expressed that the use of this type of activities allowed them to use the language communicatively and this triggered their motivation.

It is important to highlight that during the focus group, students manifested a strong desire to use information gap activities in their regular English classes. Since when the researcher asked them the questions: if the teacher could use information gap activities in each regular English Class, what would you think about it? A 43% of them said that they liked the idea.

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