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# Improving Economics Education Student's Interaction Ability in Business English Through a Task - Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity)

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# **History Article**

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#### Keywords

A Task-Based Approach; Interaction and Communication; Opinion Gap Activity

#### **Abstract**

This research aims to find out the effectiveness of learning using a Task-Based Approach (Opinion-Gap Activity) in order to enhance student's interaction and communication ability in Business English (Speaking Skills). This research analyzed 20 Bilingual Class students of Economics Education Department, Office Administration Education Study Program, Economics Faculty of Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES). This research was a class action research and implemented two cycles. The data collection technique used primary data and secondary data. The implementation of a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) in Business English learning is very effective for students in order to enhance the student's interaction and communication ability in Business English. Then, this model of learning also increases students' self-confidence when they communicate in English. In other words, student's speaking skills in English is improved. In addition, it also enhances lecturer's ability to manage Business English learning and enhances student's activities and attention during learning process.

#### How to Cite

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#### INTRODUCTION

ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is an integration of South East Asian countries in economics. Encountering AEC situation, English skill as the international language is absolutely important and required in communication. English is the key of global competition, which becomes a means to deal with AEC competition. Khamkhien (2010) states that English is as communication tool and it is an international language. Graduates of Economics Education Study Program of Universitas Negeri Semarang are expected to be prepared to face AEC and they must have English communication skills. These skills support the graduate's performance in dealing with the high rate working competition in this Global era and English interaction skill is quite relevant to the need of job market. According to Khamkhien (2010), speaking skills or interaction is a productive skill and it is one of four important skills in English that are listening, reading, and writing skills. The fact is that Economic Education student's English communication ability is quite low because they rarely interact to and communicate with peer students and lecturers in English in the classroom and out of the classroom. Aida (1994) explained that factors that influence the low ability of students are low self-confidence, afraid of being mistake, and afraid of being critic. Then, Tsiplakides (2009) claims that low motivation is also a factor that influence students' ability in speaking. The score of Pretest speaking of 20 students in a class as presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. Pre-Test of Speaking Skills Score

Aspect	Pre-Test			
Lowest Score	60			
Highest Score	75			
Class Average	50			

Source: Processed Data (2017)

Based on table.1 above, it is clear that student's highest score for speaking is only 75 and the class average is 50. In fact, students are still shy and unmotivated to use English in campus. One of the problems in English learning is that the lesson is emphasized on grammar and it is not on conversation activities. They only master English grammar, for example, tenses, but they do not apply it in daily conversation. English will be more effective when it is used and applied even if students do not master it in depth. As an effort to enhance student's interaction ability in English, lecturer must creatively choose teaching methods. With regard to method selection, Ahmadi and Supriyono (1991) state that "in learning process, when educators choose teaching methods, they should consider some concerns such as the objective of education, educator's ability, learner's need, and content or material of the learning". Educators who are able to manage and create a positive atmosphere in the classroom is very helpful in learning process. Kitano (2001) suggests that lecturers should find the ways of supporting students and provide positive reinforcement to reduce things that hindered English skills such as anxious and confidence. Moreover, Kankam and Boateng (2017) establishes that an important role of educators in managing a friendly and pleasant environment are facilitating students to speak in English and it creates good learning outcomes. Moreover, Varron (2011) states that lecturers are the ones who facilitate the entire process and create a conducive environment in the classroom.

Based on the description above, it is assumed that teaching and learning methods selection is very important to enhance student's communication and interaction ability in English. In this case, A Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) can be applied to enhance student's communication and interaction ability in Business English. This applied method is effective and it motivates student to interact and talk in the classroom. By using this method, students eager to communicate in Business English. In addition, Nunan (2006)

states that this method aims to provide an opportunity for students to do an experiment with exploring spoken and written through learning activities that designed by engaging students in practical and functional language learning for meaningful purposes.

Learning a foreign language, especially business English, speaking is one of important skills and student's success in learning the foreign language will be measured according to how they use such language orally (Nunan, 1998; Nunan, 2004). In addition, speaking is an interactive process to generate meaning derived from creating, receiving, and processing information (Brown, 1994; Bums & Joyce, 1997). How to speak and its meaning depend on the existing context between the speaker, experience, physical environment, and objective of speaking. In learning business English, of the four language skills, which are Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW), speaking is the most dominant. Therefore, in order to speak English fluently, not only mastering language elements such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary (linguistic competency), student must also understand when, why and how they use the language (sociolinguistic competency) (Cunningham, 1999). Various efforts have been conducted by language researchers to classify speaking function in human interaction. Brown and Yule (1983) distinguish speaking function into two; interactional function (building and maintaining social relationship) and transactional function (focusing on information exchange). Furthermore, Richards (2006), adapting the framework of Brown and Yule (1983), classifies speaking function into three categories: speaking as interaction; speaking as transaction; and speaking as performance.

Speaking as interaction is known with the term of conversation. Conversation is a social function or method to socialize in the community. When people meet, they greet each other, have small talk, tell new things, etc. because they want to create comfort in interaction. Richards (2008) concludes that there are some main aspects of speaking as an interaction, namely: 1) as social function; 2) formal or casual; 3) using conversation rules; 4) having a degree of politeness; 5) using general terms; 6) using a degree of conversation; and 7) arranged regularly. Furthermore, skills used in speaking as an interaction are: choosing topic; having small talk; joking; telling personal occurrence and experience; taking turn in pairs; interrupting; reacting to the other; and using correct speaking style (Richards, 2008).

Speaking as a transaction focuses on what is being talked or what is being done. The main purpose is to covey messages that understood clearly and accurately. The examples of speaking as an interaction: 1) class group discussion and problem solving; 2) designing poster; 3) speaking with a computer technician; 4) discussing tour plan with a hotel officer or a guide; 5) searching for flight information; 6) asking someone of road direction; 7) buying something in a shop; and 8) ordering meal in restaurant (Richards, 2008). Furthermore, other aspects of speaking as a transaction are: 1) focusing on information; 2) focusing on the message, not the participant; 3) participant uses a communication strategy to be understood; 4) there is question, repetition, and checking of understanding; 5) there is negotiation; and 6) linguistic accuracy is not quite important.

Speaking as a performance refers to how to speak in public, that is speaking to convey information such as presentation in the classroom, public notification, and speech. Examples of speaking as a performance are: 1) reporting school trip; 2) debating in class; 3) giving speech; 4) sale presentation; and 5) lecturing. Meanwhile, skills of speaking as a performance are: 1) using correct language format; 2) presenting information appropriately; 3) interacting with participant; 4) using correct pronunciation and grammar; 5) affecting participant; and 6) using correct vocabulary (Richards, 2008)

Instructional task is an important component in English teaching and learning process. Type of tasks influences student's appearance positively. Therefore, lecturers should give tasks in learning because they encourage student to learn language more effectively. According to (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996) "using task in English learning process can make student communicate effectively and fluently". If it is viewed from various contexts of English teaching and learning, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can be used in teaching and learning English because it can give student opportunity to communicate in the classroom, since task-based teaching encourage students to communicate more. Thus, TBLT is an effective model of communicative English language teaching. Prabhu (1987) used task-based instruction method on secondary school in Bangalore, India. Prabhu found that his students learn non-linguistic matters easily just like when they concentrate on linguistic question. He believed that student can learn more effectively when their though focuses on the task, not on the language they use (prabhu.1987, as cited in littlewood, 2004). Moreover, Barnard dan Nguyen (2010) stated that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been implemented on English curriculum in Asia. In recent years, researchers, curriculum experts, syllabus experts and educational innovators have stated that language teaching will be better if English lecturers or teachers use tasks in teaching process, both in and out of the classroom. "Tasks that given to students are based on communicative and interactive tasks" (Nunan. 2004). Then. Ellis (2003) states that TBLT is a form of teaching which uses language as a means of communication, not the subject to learn. This means that if students want to enhance their speaking competency, they must use English in various situations such as in discussion, debate and information exchange.

Every individual defines "task" differently. Most of the people define task as an activity to achieve a result or an objective. Meanwhile, Prabhu (1987) defines task as "an activity that requires learners to achieve the result of information given through thinking processes which enables teachers to control and set tasking process. Furthermore, Nun-

an (1999) defines task as class work involving learners in manipulating, producing and interacting in English in which they focus their attention on the meaning, not on the grammar. Willis (1996) says that task is an objectiveoriented activity. By implying and working task, learner may practice English. Moreover, Prabu (1987) classifies task into three, namely; information-gap activity, reasoning-gap activity, and opinion-gap activity. Information-gap activity is an activity to transfer information given from one to another student or from one to another form, or from one to another place. In general, it is in the form of information coding into language. An example is co-worker in which each member of associate has whole information (for example, in an incomplete conception) to be distributed orally to the others. Another example is presentation tabular filling with information available in separate sheet. Gap-reasoning activity involves some new information from information given through relationship or pattern inference, deduction, or perception processes. One of the examples is a teacher working beyond schedule. The teachers present a reason why they have to work beyond the designated schedule. Another example is determining the best course (for example, cheapest or quickest) for certain objective and in certain limitation. This activity must involve understanding and conveyance of information, because of information gap. Opinion-gap activity is an activity to identify and articulate personal preference, feeling, or attitude in responding certain situation. The example is completing a story and taking a role in discussion on recent issues. This activity involves the use of factual information and conveyance of argument to confirm someone's opinion, however, there is no objectivity to refer it as correct or wrong, and there is no reason to expect the same result from different individual or in different opportunity.

#### **METHODS**

This research analyzed 20 Bilingual

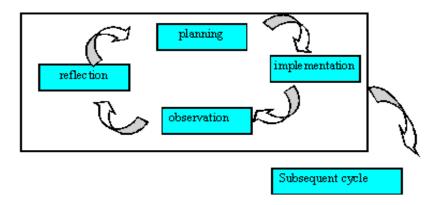


Figure 1. PTK flow Source: Sukardi (2003)

Class students of Economics Education Department, Office Administration Education Study Program Concentration. This was a class action research which in stages of (a) planning; (b) implementation; (c) observation; and (d) reflection as expressed in the following figure.

This class action research was planned on the topics of Business and Businessman, Global Trade, Promoting a Product, Business Communication, and Getting a Job. The stages of research implementation of each cycle consisted of planning, implementation, observation and reflection. A cycle was terminated when designated objective had been achieved: (a) at least 75% of the students acquire final score above seventy-five; (b) at least 75% of the students will be actively learning, (c) lecturer's enhanced capability in teaching management.

The activities of the research include the following stages:

# (a) Preparation

In this stage, researcher identifies the problem carefully by collecting data as complete as possible of both students and lecturers. The data are matters or variations in the form of note, book, transcript, newspaper, meeting report, and so forth (Arikunto, 1998). The data of student's low interaction and communication ability in English were collected by interviewing the students. The data also obtained from observation and discussion during teaching and learning process. The collected

data were organized and analyzed. The analysis results used as suggestion in arranging learning program and action plan that applied in class problem solving.

# (b) Action

In this stage, teaching and learning were conducted by applying a Task - Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) to the topics of Business and Businessman, Global Trade, Promoting a Product, Business Communication, and Getting a Job. The teaching was conducted by one of lecturers of Business English course, who was a research. Meanwhile, the other researcher teams observed the teaching and learning activity.

## (c) Observation

The action was observed for each cycle during teaching and learning process.

# (d) Analysis and reflection

An analysis based on the results of observation was conducted in this stage. The observation results were presented in joint discussion activity between lecturer and observer team (researcher team). In the discussion, it may discuss anything related to the teaching and learning implementation. The analysis results, in the form of suggestion, used to improve and implement of the next cycle teaching and learning process.

The indicators of success of the implemented model are: a) at least 75% of the students acquired score above 75; b) 75% of the students were active during learning process;

- c) 75% of the students were active in group discussion; d) 75% of the students were confident during communication activity in Business English. The source of data were 20 students of Office Administration Education of 2014 class (Bilingual Class), Economics Education Department, Faculty of Economics, UNNES. The data collection techniques used primary data and secondary data, they are as follows:
- (a) Observation guideline that is direct observation of teaching and learning of Business English using a Task-Based Approach (Opinion-Gap Activity).
- (b) Check List for document: observation sheet, teaching assessment sheet, learning achievement quiz or test, and lecturer note/journal.

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) in Business English course aims to enhance student's interaction and communication ability. This approach exposes students to use English actively. A Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) is applied to Business English course for the topics of Business and Businessman, Global Trade, Promoting a Product, Business Communication, and Getting a Job. In addition, it is also one of the methods to enhance student's confidence, motivation and courage to use English. The level of student's interaction and communication ability in English can be viewed from their learning achievement. The data obtained during research can be seen in the table 2.

Based on the table.2 above, it is very clear that after using a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) in teaching and learning process in the first cycle, 13 students (65%) obtain score above 75 and 7 students (35%) obtain equal to or lower 75. Meanwhile, in the second cycle, 18 students (90%) obtain above 75 and 2 students (10%) obtain equal to or lower than 75. Based on the research results data, it may conclude that there is an increase of the number of students who obtain score above 75 from 3 to 18 students. In the second cycle, one of the indicators of success in teaching using a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) has been achieved, in which 90% of the students obtain score above 75, and in the second cycle, 18 students (90%) obtain score above 75.

Table 2. Results of Analysis on Students' Learning Achievement

No	Description	Cycle 1	Percentage	Cycle 2	Percentage
1	Score>75	13	65%	18	90%
2	Score≤ 75	7	35%	2	10%
	Total	20	100%	20	100%

Source: Processed Data (2017)

Table 3. Data of Students' Interaction and Communication

	Gro	oup 1	Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Group 5	
	Ι	II	I	II	Ι	II	I	II	Ι	II
Task Performance	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	4	2	3
Fluency	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	4	2	3
Language	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	4	2	3

Category: (See evaluation rubric of attachment 1)

Source: Processed Data (2017)

Student interaction through teaching and learning process using a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) s observed by using evaluation rubric, and the results can be found in the table 3.

From the table. 3 above, Task Performance, Fluency, and Language of each student group ban be seen. The teaching and learning process is observed from the start of class until the end of class. In the first cycle, the score of task performance of group I is 1, which means that students interact and communicate ineffectively. Meanwhile, in the second cycle, the score is 2, which means that they communicate effectively. In the first cycle, the score of fluency of group I is 2, which means that the students communicate and respond well. In the second cycle, the score is 2, which means that they communicate and respond well. In the first cycle, the score of language of group I is 2, which means that they find it difficult because of limited vocabulary and error in grammar. However, in the second cycle, the score is 3, which means that they have more vocabularies but find it awkward in expressi-

In the first cycle, the score of task performance of group II is 2, which means that they start to interact and communicate effectively. However, in the second cycle, the score is 3, which means that they communicate effectively. In the first cycle, the score of fluency of group II is 2, which means that they communicate and respond well but their vocabularies are limited. In the second cycle, the score is 3, which means that they communicate and respond well and add other information with regard to the topics. In the first cycle, the score of language of group II is 2, which means that they find it difficult to convey information because of limited vocabularies and error in grammar. However, in the second cycle, the score is 3, which means that they have many vocabularies but they are still awkward in expression.

In the first cycle, the score of task performance of group III is 2, which means that the students start to interact and communicate effectively. In the contrary, in the second cycle, the score is 3, which means that they communicate effectively. In the first cycle, the score of fluency of group III is 2, which means that they communicate and respond but their vocabularies are limited. In the second cycle, the score is 3, which means that they communicate and respond well and add other information related to the topics. In the first cycle, the score of language of group III is 3, which means that they find it awkward in conveying information because of limited vocabularies and error in grammar. In the second cycle, the score is still 3, which means that they have many vocabularies but find it awkward in expression.

In the first cycle, the score of task performance of group IV is 3, which means that the students start to interact and communicate effectively. However, in the second cycle, the score is 4, which means that they communicate highly effectively. In the first cycle, the score of fluency of group IV is 3, which means that they interact and communicate well and they add other information. In the second cycle, the score is 4, which means that they communicate and respond well and convey opinion quite casually. In the first cycle, the score of language of group IV is 3, which means that they convey information awkwardly. However, in the second cycle, the score is 4, which means that they express almost naturally and not awkwardly.

In the first cycle, the score of task performance of group V is 2, which means that the students start to interact and communicate effectively. However, in the second cycle, the score is3, which means that they communicate effectively. In the first cycle, the score of fluency of group V is 2, which means that they communicate and respond but their vocabularies are limited. In the second cycle, the score is3, which means that they communicate and respond well and add other information related to the topic. In the first cycle, the score of language of group V is 2, which means that they find it difficult to convey information because of limited vocabularies and error in grammar. However, in the second cycle, the

Table. 4. Data of Student's Activeness and Attention During Learning Process

No	Observed Variable	Description	
		Cycle 1	Cycle 2
1	Student's interest in material	2	4
2	Student's activeness during teaching and learning process	2	3
3	Student's participation in achieving learning objectives	2	4
4	Student's cooperation in learning and teaching process	2	3
5	Student's ability in communicating ideas and notions in front of the classroom	2	4

Category: 1 = K, 2 = C, 3 = B, 4 = SBSource Processed Data (2017)

score is3, which means that they have many vocabularies but find it awkward in expression.

It could be concluded that student's interaction and communication ability in teaching and learning process is enhanced. According to the observation results, student's ability in learning by applying a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) is very effective. The results of observation on student's activeness and attention in learning process can be found in the table 4.

Based on the table.4 above, it could be explained that in the first cycle, the score of student's interest in course material is 2 (average), the score of student's activeness during learning is 2 (average), the score of student's participation in achieving learning objective is 2 (average), the score of student's cooperation in teaching and learning process is 2 (average), the score of student's ability in conveying ideas or notions in front of the classroom is 2 (average). In the contrary, in the second cycle of the score of student's interest in course material is 4 (very good), the score of student's activeness during learning is 3 (good), the score of student's participation in achieving learning objective is 4 (very good), the score of student's cooperation in teaching and learning process is 3 (good), the score of student's ability in conveying ideas or notions is 4 (very good).

This research applies teaching and lear-

ning process using a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity). Based on the research results presented above, teaching and learning using a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) is very effective and able to enhance student's interaction and communication ability in English. It could be found in their learning achievement. In the implementation of teaching and learning of the first cycle, the research target of 75% of the students obtaining score above 75 has not been gotten, thus the cycle is repeated. In the first cycle, only 13 students (65%) obtain score above 75, in which this is caused by student's adaptation to the change in teaching and learning method. Lecturers initially teach Business English course by using speech, discussion and presentation. Students, in the first cycle, are not used to the application of a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) to the material. This causes only 13 students are able to reconvey what they have listened to, while the remaining 7 students are not yet able to interact and communicate well, thus their scores are not optimal. Therefore, based on the results of reflection of the lecturers and the observers, the cycle needs to be repeated. In the second cycle, the number of students obtaining score above 75 increases to 18 out of 20 students (90%). In this second cycle, the research target has been achieved, that is 75% of the students obtain score above 75. Since the research target has been achieved, the action is ceased in the second cycle.

In the first cycle, the scores of tasks performance for all student groups are 1,2 and 3, which means that they interact and communicate ineffectively. However, in the second cycle, the scores are 3 and 4, which means that they communicate effectively. In the first cycle, the score of fluency for all of student groups is respectively 2, which means that the students communicate, present opinion and respond to all given topics but their vocabularies are still limited. In the second cycle, the scores are 3 and 4, which means that they communicate and respond well and ad other information with regard to the given topic. In the first cycle, the scores of languages of all student groups are 2 and 3, which means that they find it difficult to convey information because of limited vocabularies and error in grammar. However, in the second cycle, the scores are 3 and 4, which means that they communicate well and respond to and present any opinion well, express well, have their confidence and motivation enhanced, are relaxed and speak casually.

Student's activeness and attention during teaching and learning process in the first cycle shows that the score of student's interest in course material is only 2 (average). This is caused by their adaptation, in which they only take a note in teaching learning process but they are demanded to express their opinion. Student's activeness in the teaching and learning is not optimal yet, in which only 5 out of 20 students actively ask or answer lecturer's questions. Student's cooperation is also poor, in which they tend to hesitate to ask to their friends with higher ability. In addition, when they ask to tell again the material they have obtained, they have low confidence and low motivation. Therefore, the reflection in the first cycle needs to be repeated in the next cycle.

In the second cycle, student's interest in course material increases from average to very good. This can be found from their seriousness in the teaching and learning process. They are very enthusiastic to express their opinion on

the topic in discussion. Their motivation increases and they are relaxed in expressing their opinion. In addition, the ability of students to communicate the material they have received is well and fluently since their vocabularies increase and they have less error in grammar. It could be found this from the increasing of scores and appearance when they convey the materials in front of their respective group and in front of the classroom.

In overall, it may be concluded that the implementation of a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) in the teaching and learning of Business English is very effective. It enhances student's interaction and communication ability in Business English. In other words, student's speaking skills in English is improved. In addition, it also improves lecturer's ability to manage the teaching of Business English and student's activities and attention during teaching and learning process.

# **CONCLUSION**

A Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity gives an opportunity to the students to express their opinion, to comment, and to justify the given topics. Teaching and learning process uses a Task-Based Approach (Opinion Gap Activity) is very effective to enhance student's interaction and communication ability in Business English. In other words, student's speaking skills in English is enhanced. In addition, it also increases their motivation, confidence, activeness and attention and also improves lecturer's ability in teaching management. It is suggested to teachers or lecturers implement this model of teaching. In other words, the method is used for a small class, but not for a big class. The supporting facilities and infrastructure such as LCD, audio visual and Wi-Fi must be available.

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