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The effects of 'Find the Difference' and 'Describe and Draw' activities on speaking ability of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the difference in the effects of "Find the Difference" and "Describe and Draw" activities on enhancing speaking ability of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. The researcher adopted an experimental approach. This study consisted of 50 female participants, who were equally and randomly divided into two experimental groups. First, the researcher administered an Oxford Placement Test, followed by two interviews to make sure that the participants' level was pre-intermediate. Then, the researcher developed a teacher-made test and in order to prove the validity of the developed test a group of 40 participants, other than the major participants, took the test. The participants were divided into two experimental groups and the pre-test was administered before the instructional treatment. The treatment lasted for eight sessions and during this time the experimental groups received information gap activities. Finally, the post-test was administrated for the two groups and the results of the posttest were analyzed through some statistical procedures to determine the effect of the two types of information gap activities on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. The results indicated that there was no significant different in the performance of the two groups on the posttest which revealed that the two instructional techniques (i.e., 'Find the Difference' and 'Describe and Draw') were equally effective on enhancing Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners' speaking ability.

Keywords

Describe and Draw task, Find the Difference task, Speaking ability.

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Introduction

Background

Language is for communication. People can transfer information and communicate their ideas and feelings through language. Learning English is very important, especially for students, because English is an international language. There are four skills that the students should master: listening, reading, writing and speaking skills. Speaking a language is specifically hard for foreign language learners because effective oral communication needs the ability to use the language appropriately in social interactions.

Information gap is an activity in which the students may be in pairs or in groups of several people. They can be given different pieces of information about a topic to enable them to complete a task by sharing this separated information. Information gap is a helpful and interesting technique because it gives every student opportunity to speak and it considers the way we use language as a means of communication in real life. Moreover, speaking with peers is less frightening than presenting in front of the whole class and being evaluated. In this research, information gap activities are represented by two techniques that are 'Find the difference', and 'Describe and draw'.

In *describe and draw* activity, one student has a picture which they must not show to their partner. All the partner has to do is to draw the picture without looking at the original picture, so the one with the picture will give instructions and descriptions and his partner will ask questions and draw the picture.

In *find the difference* such as, puzzle books and newspaper entertainment sections, students each look at a picture which is very similar to the one their partner has. They have to find and say ten differences between their pictures without showing their pictures to each other. This means they will have to do a lot of describing and questioning and answering to find the differences. They can be useful in improving students' speaking ability.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher believes that the speaking skill, especially at pre-

intermediate levels, has been less considered and that is why in the current study the main focus was on the teaching of speaking at pre-intermediate levels based on information gap activities. In the current study, the researcher tried to propose a solution for teachers to implement one of the teaching techniques and help students to develop their oral communication skills in English. Information gap tasks through 'Find the difference' and 'Describe and draw' activities are techniques for improvement of speaking ability, and the major question in this study was "is there any significant difference in the effects of "Find the Difference" and "Describe and Draw" activities on enhancing speaking ability of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?"

This study will be beneficial for students and teachers. This encourages teachers to design appropriate contexts and adapt the implementation of information gap activities to improve speaking mastery. In addition, the findings of this research could be beneficial to syllabus designers and text book writers in putting their selection, sequencing and grading on a more useful and practical basis.

The researcher believes that the speaking skill, at information gap activities especially at the two activities "Find the difference" and "Describe and draw" has been less considered and previous findings were not enough and clear. And the researcher attempted to fill this gap and to suggest a solution for teachers to implement one of the teaching techniques and help students to develop their students' oral communication skills in English. To investigate the effect of "Find the Difference" and" Describe and Draw" activities on enhancing speaking ability, the following research question was proposed.

Is there any significant difference between the effects of "Find the Difference" and "Describe and Draw" activities on enhancing speaking ability of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?

Literature Review

Speaking Skill

Speaking is one of the productive activities in daily life and is the

most important language skill because it is the main skill needed to conduct a conversation. Also, speaking is an interactive process for constructing and receiving information. Specially, the mastery of speaking is a priority for students in schools and universities. In the communicative model of speaking class, the students should be taught how to speak well by using the constituents of English speaking skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, communication, fluency and comprehension.

According to Richards (2008) the mastery of speaking skill in English is a primacy for most foreign language learners. Learners often assess their achievement in learning foreign language through evaluating how their speaking ability has improved. Therefore, the teachers try to get the best method, approach or technique that is good to improve the students' speaking skill since there are varieties of methods, approaches, and techniques appear from direct approaches where the teacher focuses on specific features of oral interaction to indirect approaches where the teacher focuses in creating a condition for oral interaction which is appropriate for students. Cameron (2001) states that:

> Speaking is active uses of language that makes on learners of language in term of sharing meaning. In other words, speaking is the active use of language to express meanings so that other people can make sense of them. The label productive uses of language can be applied to speaking receptively. To construct understanding in a foreign language, learners will use their existing language resources, built up from previous experience of language use. To speak in the foreign language in order to share understandings with other people requires attention to precise details of the language. A speaker needs to find the most appropriate words and a correct grammar to convey meaning accurately and precisely and needs to organize the discourse so that the listener will understand. Speaking activities, because they are so demanding, require careful and plentiful support of various types, not just support for understanding, but also support for production (p.41).

Information Gap Techniques

Information gap activities are helpful activities in which one person

has information that the other lacks. The partners must use the second language to share the information. The follwing definition is supported by Thornberry (2005, p.80) as he states that "there is a knowledge gap that can only be bridged by using language. The students have to communicate in order to achieve the task outcome."

Richards (2006, p.18) also states "that information gap refers to the fact that in real communication, people normally communicate in order to get information they do not possess." According to Brown (2001, p. 185), information gap has two characteristics. The first one is that information gap focuses on the information and not on language forms. Second, information gap prioritizes the communicative interaction in order to reach the objective. Swan (1985, p.94) views information gap as "a basic concept in contemporary methodology" then he goes on to elaborate more on information gap: When one student talks to another, we feel that it is important that new information should be transmitted across the 'gap' between them. To do this end, ingenious exercises are devised in which half the class are provided with data to which the other half do not have access; those who lack the information then have to get it by using language in a suitable way." Kayi (2006) mentioned that:

> IGT [information gap tasks] are learning activities in which each student has a duty to work with his/her partner. One student has certain information which the other student does not have. Each student has different information. In this way, the students have to exchange information in order to complete the missing one or to fill in the gap (p. 2).

Information Gap Technique (IGT) challenge participants to exchange information in order to complete a lesson plan activity. Most IGT work is done in pairs where each student has a part of information on a task to be done. According to Harris (1990), "IGT is a good strategy for learning ESL because the activities provide good practice for using sentences which the students have just learned. IGT also gives the students chances to speak, interact and exchange information amongst them. The activities also make the lesson easy to understand and the students will speak more than their teacher does."

Neu & Reeser (1997) state "Activities in IGT are useful for speaking classes. In an activity, one person has certain information that must be shared with others in order to solve a problem, gather information or make decisions." These kinds of activities are very effective in the ESL classroom.

IGT activities can also make stronger vocabulary and a variety of grammatical structures taught in class. They permit participants to use linguistic forms and functions in a communicative way. These activities bring the language to life for the participants. Participants have the opportunity to use the building blocks of the language they are learning to speak in the second language.

Roles of teachers and students in information-gap activities

In the information-gap activities, the teacher carries out some special roles. Firstly, he/she works as a "facilitator" with some specific obligations such as to provide participants with linguistic forms or masteries that they require, to organize the classroom activities, to right the linguistic errors made by participants and to give help if essential. Secondly, the teacher plays a role of a co-communicator and takes part in students' activities. Lastly, during the activities, the teacher keeps participants under observation to understand good and bad points of participants to plan future activities. Learners often engage in role play or dramatization to adapt their use of the second language to various social contexts. - Learners' needs, styles and goals are focused on or accounted for. Learners are given some control; their creativity and new idea are encouraged.

Benefits of using information-gap activities in teaching speaking skill

The following are some of the benefits of using information-gap activities in teaching speaking skill:

1. Developing both accuracy and fluency of students
2. Ensuring equal students' participation
3. Improving students' ability of negotiating meaning
4. Increasing students' motivation for speaking

Bailey (2005, p. 46) states that "in order to develop the students' speaking skills, the writer uses Information Gap. The idea of the

information gap as an organizing concept for a speaking activity is that one person has information that another lacks." It means that the participants must use English to divide that information in order to achieve a task.

Afterwards, here are three definitions of Information Gap. The first is by Neu&Reeser (1997) in Violet Raptou he states that "in information gap activity, one person has certain information that must be shared with others in order to solve a problem, gather information or make decisions". The second is by Harmer (2007, p. 129) who writes "an information gap is where two speakers have different bits of information, and they can only complete the whole pictures by sharing that information-because they have different information, there is a 'gap' between them". The third is by DoritSasson who defines that information gap activities are those in which participants exchange information in order to complete a required lesson plan activity. Most information gap activities are done in pairs, with each participant having a part of the information.

Related Empirical studies

Some experts have discussed the advantages of applying information gaps activities in teaching speaking. Hess (2001) confirmed that information gap activities can provide a comprehensive feedback from the learners, such as a wide variety of opinions, references, and values, many different experiences and styles of learning. Then, he also added that information gap activities can promote a learner-autonomous learning style. According to Neu and Reeser (1997) "Information Gap Activities are useful for various reasons. Information Gap provides an opportunity for extended speaking practice, they represent real communication, motivation can be high, and they require sub-skills such as clarifying meaning and re-phrasing. It is very useful and helpful for the students to practice speaking in the real meaningful communication which involve sharing the different information in the task to each other."

A study conducted by Karimi (2010) revealed that the EFL learners' degree of learning increases when they learn new words by

the use of information-gap tasks in the classroom. Also the learners in the experimental group – taught through the use of information-gap tasks – were gradually seen to become less dependent upon teacher's help.

Another study conducted by Jondeya (2011) investigated the effectiveness of using information gap on developing speaking skills for eight graders in Gaza governorate schools. For achieving this aim, she adopted the experimental approach. The results proved that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the pre & post speaking test of the experimental group in each level of speaking skills in favor of posttest. The results also indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores of each level of speaking skills in the post test for experimental group compared with the control group.

Astuti (2011) implemented information gap activities and other accompanying actions to enrich the students' speaking ability. The research was done in two cycles. The findings showed that the students' speaking ability was improved. The students are also more confident, enthusiastic, and active in doing activities during the teaching learning process. One popular information gap activity is called *Describe and draw*. In this activity, one student has a picture which they must not show their partner. All the partner has to do is draw the picture without looking at the original, so the one with the picture will give instructions and descriptions, and the artist will ask questions.

In the present study, the two experimental groups did not have any difference with each other and both tasks were communicative instruction activities. They were different from audio lingual and memorization and repetitive activities.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were chosen none-randomly at some language institutes in Qom. They were 50 female pre-intermediate English

students who had enrolled in pre-intermediate English courses at the institutes .Their age range was 12 to 16. The participants were divided into two experimental groups.

Instruments

In order to homogenize the participants' proficiency level, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used in this study. The researcher administered a teacher-made test and a PET standard test (2010) in order to choose the participants. The researcher also used printed materials; for example, she used 15 pictures downloaded from the Internet in "Find the Differences" activity and 15 pictures in "Describe and Draw" activity.

Data Collection Procedure

The participants were divided into two experimental groups. The researcher used information gap activities including "Find the difference"and "Describe and draw", which were used in teaching the experimental groups. In order to prove the validity of the teacher-made test a group of 40 participants, who were different from the two experimental groups mentioned above, were chosen. Then, to this group the OPT test was administered so that 20 out of the 40 participants who were at a pre-intermediate level could be selected. Then the teacher-made test and a PET test were administered to compute the correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores in order to validate the developed test. Since the focus of the study was on the speaking skill, two interviewers interviewed students and then the researcher calculated the correlation. The correlation results are presented in following tables. Table 1 displays descriptive statistics information regarding the PET and teacher-made tests and Table 2 represents the results of the Pearson Correlation analysis. The correlation coefficient was .8, which indicate a high relationship between the two tests and proves the validity of the teacher-made test.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of PET and Teacher-made Tests

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET	20.00	30.00	25.10	2.75
Teacher-made test	22.00	30.00	25.55	2.41

N=20

Table 2. Pearson Correlation between PET and Teacher-made tests

Test	PET	Teacher-made
Person correlation	1	.80
Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
N	20	20

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Then, for the main groups, the researcher administered an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) followed by two interviews to make sure that the participants' level was pre-intermediate, and 50 participants were chosen out of the 70 participants. Then the pretest was administered before the treatment. The researcher administered the teacher-made test as a pre-test and post-test for the participants. Two interviewers interviewed students and then the students whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen for the study.

The treatment lasted for eight sessions and researcher explained her teaching procedure to participants in one session. One of the experimental groups included 25 participants who were divided into five groups of 5 participants. Every group received pictures related to "Describe and Draw" activity.Eight pictures of "Describe and Draw" were chosen and downloaded from the Internet by the researcher for the mentioned activity. The researcher used "Find the Difference" activity like the pervious activity. The experimental group for "Find the Difference activity" consisted of 25 participants and similary 8 pictures which were pertinent to the "Find the Difference" were chosen and downloaded from the Internet. In "Find the Difference" group, the participants each looked at a picture which was very similar to the one their partners had. They had to find, say, differences between their pictures without showing their pictures to each other.

This means they had to do a lot of describing and questioning and answering to find the differences. But in "Describe and Draw", one participant had a picture which they must not show to her partners. All the partner had to do was drawing the picture without looking at the original, so the one with the picture gave instructions and descriptions and the drawer asked questions. During this time the participants often made mistakes in grammar and had errors in pronunciation. Mispronunciation and using wrong grammar in oral English affected participants' speaking accuracy. Every session, participants were given the opportunity to speak in the class and discussed what they had drawn in their pictures. Speaking in the class greatly motivated the participants to speak.

Design of study

This study followed a quasi-experimental design. The design of this study included two experimental groups and each experimental group received treatment. The researcher administered a teacher-made test (based on KET Cambridge university press (2011) and a standard test (Based on PET Cambridge university press (2010) in order to choose the participants. The researcher used printed materials, for example in "Find the Differences activity" the researcher used 15 pictures downloaded from the Internet and 15pictures in "describe and draw activity". In this design researcher employed a pre- test and post- test before and after the treatment.

Data Analysis

The result of post-test was analyzed through independent samples t-test to determine whether the difference between the two experimental groups on the post test was significant not. The analysis or of the test scores was done through SPSS software to determine whether or not the hypothesis was rejected.

Data Analysis and results

Restatement of research hypothesis

The main aim of this study was to investigate the effect of "Find the

difference" and "Describe and draw" on enhancing the speaking of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. The research question was "Is there any statistically significant difference in the effects of "Find the Difference" and "Describe and Draw" activities on enhancing speaking ability of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?

Descriptive statistics of teacher- made test and PET standard test

Table 3 illustrates descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation and maximum and minimum scores of obtained results on the teacher-made and PET test scores of the two groups.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of PET and Teacher-made Tests

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET	20.00	30.00	25.10	2.75
Teacher-made test Valid N (list wise)	22.00	30.00	25.55	2.41

N=20

According to table 4, the correlation between the PET test and the teacher-made test was very high (r=.80) and the teacher-made test was shown to have a high validity.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation between PET and Teacher-made Tests

Test	PET	Teacher-made
Person correlation	1	.80
Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
N	20	20

Descriptive statistics of pre-test scores

1. Test of normality for the pretest

The test of normality for the pretest indicated that the data were normally distributed and there was normal distribution of scores on the pretest. The significance value (.39) proves normal distribution.

Table 5. Test of Normality for the Pre-test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	.09	50	.20	.97	50	.39

a. Lilliefors Significance correction

The following figure displays the Q-Q plot for the pretest results.

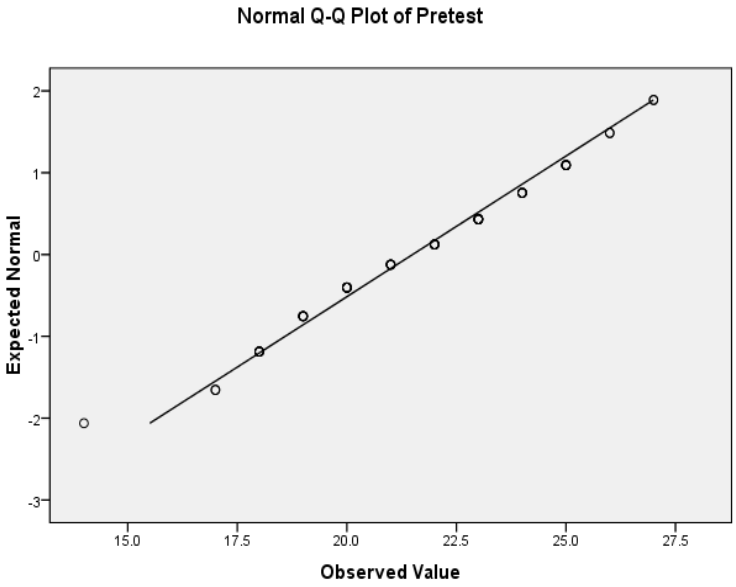

Fig. 1. Normal Q-Q Plot of Pre-test

2. Analysis of Pre-test results

Table 6 illustrates descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation and standard error mean of measurement of obtained results on pre-test scores of the two groups.

The following table shows the performance of the two groups on the pretest. As the table indicates the means of the two groups was not much different. It suggests that the two groups were similar before the treatment. However, an independent samples t-test was required to show if the difference between the groups was significant or not.

To compare the two groups on the test, an independent samples t-test was carried out on the scores of the participants of the two groups. The table 4.4 displays the descriptive statistics of the two groups' performance. As it is shown there was a difference in the performance of the two groups; the mean of the first group was 22 out of 30 and the mean of the second group was 21.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the pretest scores

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Find the Difference	25	22.00	3.26	.65
	Describe and Draw	25	21.00	2.46	.49

However, the results of the independent samples t-test, which is displayed in the following table, indicated that the difference was not statistically significant. The P value (Sig=.22), which was considerably higher than the critical .05 value, proved that there was not a significant difference between the two groups in their performance on the test. And the groups were almost the same in terms of their test performance.

The independent samples t-test comparing the performance of the Find the difference and Describe and draw groups on the pre-test indicated the groups were not significantly different. The results (t = 1.22, Sig = .22), the p vale of which is considerably above the critical p value, shows that the groups did not differ significantly.

Table 7. Independent Samples T-Test of the Pre-test Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								90% Difference Error Confidence	
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	mean	Std.	Difference Lower	Difference Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.57	.21	1.22	48	.22	1.00	.81	-.64	2.64

The following figure represents the performance of the two groups on the pre-test. As the table displays, there was not much difference in the performance of the two groups on the pretest. The performance of the find the difference was slightly better but there was no significant difference between the two groups in their pretest scores.

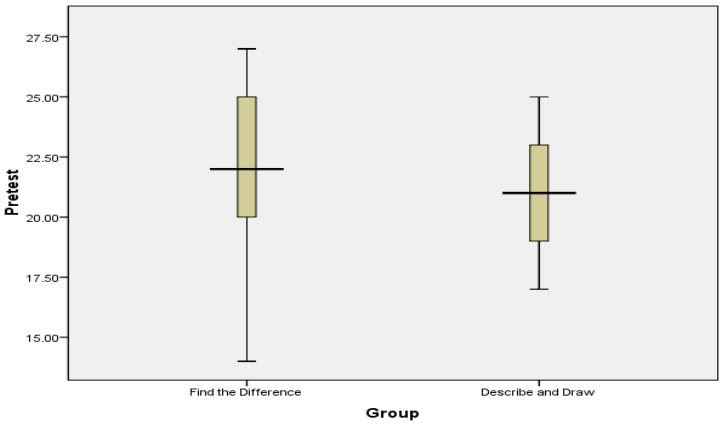

Fig. 2. Pre-test of groups

Descriptive statistics of post-test scores

1. Test of normality for the posttest

The test of normality for the posttest indicated that the data were normally distributed and there was normal distribution of scores on the posttest. The significance value (.84) proves normal distribution.

Table 8. Test of Normality for the Posttest

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	**df**	**Sig.**	**Statistic**	**df**	**Sig.**
Post test	.08	50	.20	.98	50	.84

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

The following figure displays the Q-Q plot for the posttest results.

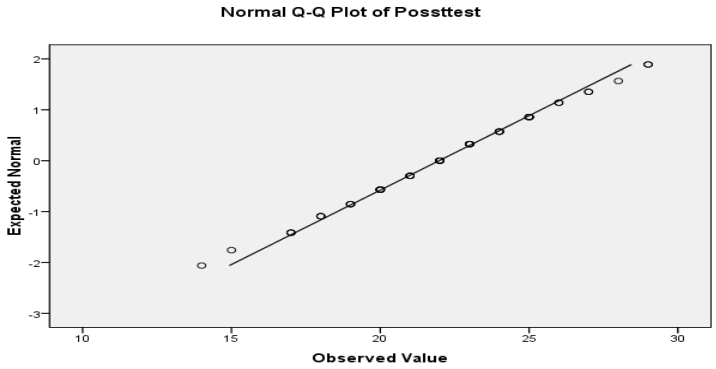

Fig. 3. Normal Q-Q plot of post-test

2. Analysis of Posttest results

Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics of the post test scores (means, standard deviations and standard error mean of measurement of obtained results on post-test scores of the two groups. The following table shows the performance of the two groups on the posttest. As the table indicates the means of the two groups was not much different. It suggests that the two groups were similar after the treatments (Find the difference and Describe and draw instructional programs). However, an independent samples t-test was required to show if the difference between the groups was significant or not.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of the post-test scores

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post test	Find the Difference	25	22.44	3.99	.79
	Describe and Draw	25	21.52	2.74	.54

According to table 9, the independent samples t-test comparing the performance of the Find the difference and Describe and draw groups on the post-test indicated the groups were not significantly different. The results (t = .95, Sig = .34), the p vale of which is considerably above the critical p value, shows that the groups did not differ significantly. This indicates that there was no significant difference in the effects of the two types of instruction (describe and draw and find the difference activities) on the speaking performance of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. The two techniques were equally effective.

Table 10. Independent Samples T-Test of the Post-test Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								90% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.16	.14	.95	48	.34	.92	.96	-1.02	2.86
Equal variances not assumed			.95	42.51	.34	.92	.96	-1.03	2.87

The results (t=.95, df=48, Sig= .34) indicated that there was no significant difference in the performance of the two groups on the posttest. This reveals that the two methods were equally effective on the learning of the two groups.

The following figure represents the performance of the two groups on the post-test. As the table displays, there was not much difference in the performance of the two groups on the posttest. The performance of the find the difference was slightly better but there was no significant difference between the two groups in their posttest scores.

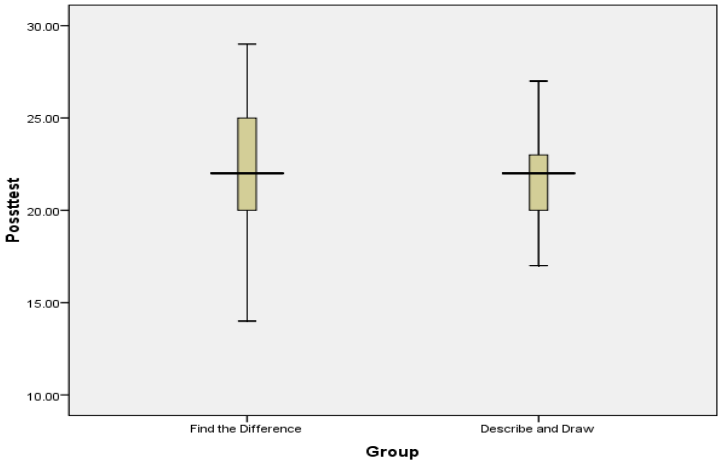

Fig. 4. Post-test of groups

Discussion and Conclusion

Summary of the findings

The objective of the current study was to investigate the effects of "Find the Difference" and "Describe and Draw" activities on enhancing speaking ability of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. The findings of the study are presented in this chapter according to the following research question.

Is there any significant difference in the effects of "Find the Difference" and "Describe and Draw" activities on enhancing speaking ability of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?

This study consisted of 50 female participants equally divided into 25 students for two experimental groups. The researcher designed

based on information gap activities including "Find the Difference", "Describe and Draw", which was used in teaching the experimental groups.The course lasted 8 sessions the researcher took a pre-test and a post-test before and after the treatment.To compare the two groups on the test, an independent samples t-test was carried out on the scores of the participants of the two groups. As it is shown the results of the independent samples t-test, which was displayed in chapter four, indicated that the difference was not statistically significant. The research proved that there was not a significant difference between the two groups in their performance on the post-test. And the groups were almost the same in terms of their post-test performance. This reveals that the two methods were equally effective on the speaking ability.

Discussion of the Results

The results of the researcher's findings are in line with the conclusions from several previous studies in using information gap activities in EFL learners. Some experts have discussed the advantages of applying information gaps activities in teaching speaking. Hess (2001) confirmed that information gap activities can provide a comprehensive feedback from the learners, such as a wide variety of opinions, references, and values, many different experiences and styles of learning. Then, he also adds that information gap activities can promote a learner-autonomous learning style.

Another research conducted by Jondeya (2011) investigated the effectiveness of using information gap on developing speaking skills for eight graders in Gaza governorate schools. For achieving this aim, she adopted the experimental approach. The results proved that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the pre & post speaking test of the experimental group in each level of speaking skills in favor of posttest.

The results also indicated that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores of each level of speaking skills in the post test for experimental group compared with the control group.

In comparing the present study with previous studies, this research showed that both methods have same effect on speaking.

According to Neu and Reeser (1997) "Information Gap activities are useful for various reasons. Information Gap provides an opportunity for extended speaking practice, they represent real communication, motivation can be high, and they require sub-skills such as clarifying meaning and re-phrasing. It is very useful and helpful for the students to practice speaking in the real meaningful communication which involve sharing the different information in the task to each other."In this study, two experimental groups did not have any difference with each other and both tasks were communicative instruction activities. They were different from audio lingual and memorization and repetitive activities.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion and findings in the previous chapter, it can be stated that the two types of information gap activities were not different in their effects on learners' speaking ability.

First, information gap activities were conducted in pairs or in groups. Hence, the activity gave the students more opportunities to practice their speaking by communicating certain information to the other friends. Information gap activities also increased the students' motivation and confidence to speak in English. The activities require students to use the target language to fill in the gap. Hence, by using the target language continuously, the students felt motivated and confident to speak in English.

Second, the improvement also reflected from the teaching learning process. The students were more active in the speaking class. They discussed well by actively asking and answering the questions. Besides, the students also understood the classroom English very well. They were able to comprehend the target language spoken by the teacher.

The use of information gap activities in the speaking class also facilitated the students to interact with the others by asking and giving the information in the target language.

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