«فصلنامه علوم‌تربیتی»
سال پنجم ـ شماره ۱۸ ـ تابستان ۱۳۹۱
ص. ص. ۶۶ - ۵۴

The Effect of the Oral Production on Grammatical Accuracy and Task-based Fluency in Speach of Iranian EFL Learners

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Reception Date: 7 Jul 2012
Accept Date: 13 Oct 2012

Abstract

One of the major issues for many teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) is finding a way of helping foreign language learners to produce acute and fluent utterances. According to the research finding the oral drill has a significant effect on producing accurate and fluent speech in second language instruction. Experts believe that English learners' oral utterances enable them to gain more profound recognition of English sentence structure, and it will facilitate subsequent acquisitions. This study set out to investigate the effect of educational production-oriented program on increasing grammatical accuracy and task- based fluency in speech. The statistical population of the study was fifty Iranian sophomore students at Islamic Azad University of Tabriz. They were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Initial homogeneity of the groups was verified using a general proficiency test and an oral pre-test. Both groups received instruction for six sessions and were taught how to use different fluency and accuracy strategies to produce more fluent and accurate speech, the experimental group, however, was required to produce oral utterances based on a picture strip at the end of each session. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group. The experimental group produced more accurate and fluent speech utterances than the control group on the post-test. The findings have significant pedagogical implications for (EFL) learners in highly limited contexts.

Key words: fluency, accuracy, task- based, pedagogical, utterance.

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I. Introduction

A major characteristic of English language programs in the post-method era is its adherence to the primacy of oral proficiency as the ultimate educational goal. This priority is justifiable with regard to both theoretical underpinnings of second language (L2) acquisition (SLA) research and the practical needs of the learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a shift of emphasis away from written proficiency as the ultimate objective in language learning programs toward the more practical need of most second and foreign language learners to develop oral proficiency so that they can make communicative use of the learned knowledge in more mundane areas of surfing the internet, communicating through electronic mail and chat rooms, comprehending English programs on satellite TV, and the like. Theoretically, more recent models of language learning (Levelt, 1989; Skehan, 1998; Swain, 1985) underscored more strongly the significance of oral production with regard to the direct and indirect contributions it makes to the process of language learning. According to the information processing model, as proposed by Levelt (1989), three hierarchically organized processing mechanisms are involved in speech production: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. Conceptualization refers to the macro-planning and micro-planning of the intended message. Through macro-planning, the speaker establishes a communicative goal, breaks it down into a series of sub-goals, and retrieves the information required for realizing them. During micro-planning, however, the propositional shape of the message is assigned in accordance with the speaker's information perspective (Ellis, 2003). Formulation involves selection of appropriate phonological, grammatical, and lexical features of the message and mapping them on to the preverbal message, and articulation comprises actual speech. It should, however, be borne in mind that speech processing is incremental in nature and all three mechanisms run in parallel. That is to say, without engaging the learners' in speech production at the formulation stage, they will never learn to produce language.

Skehan (1998), on the other hand, attributes speech processing to mental representations of the knowledge of L2 and provides an account of accurate, fluent, and complex oral speech in terms of two distinct knowledge systems. Learners, as Skehan (1998) has propounded, construct a rule-based system and an exemplar-based system which are drawn on during speech production. The exemplar-based system comprises un-analyzable chunks that have been learned and processed as wholes. This system enables the learners to have quick and easy access to ready-made exemplars in formulation stage of speech processing. Since these exemplars are accessed as wholes, they require minimal processing capacity and would have a bearing on the fluency of learners' speech (Logan, 1988). The rule-based system, by contrast, is drawn on when speakers fail to utilize the exemplar-based system due to the complicated nature of the intended proposition or its novelty. In such instances, the store of generative rules would help the speaker achieve higher degrees of accuracy, complexity, and effectiveness, but usually at the expense of

fluency because it takes more time to access and process the required language components.

Skehan (1998) underscore the indirect contributions made by learners' output to language acquisition as well. He specifies six functions for production: 1. input generating, 2. syntactic processing, 3. testing out hypotheses about the target grammar, 4. automat zing existing L2 knowledge, 5. providing opportunities for learners to develop discourse skills, and 6. helping learners to develop a personal voice.

Another account of how production impacts language acquisition has been offered by Swain (1985) in her output hypothesis which claims that output is not just the product of language acquisition, or something that only enhances fluency of the target language (TL), but a language learning generator as well that can sensitize the learners to the differences between their own output and the forms observable in the input to which they are exposed. The idea was inspired by French immersion program in Canada where teaching the content and teaching the L2 itself were integrated (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Students studying in such schools suffered from a common problem. Despite gaining high degrees of fluency through exposure to the L2 and developing excellent receptive skills, they failed to achieve comparable levels of accuracy (Schmitt & Celce-Murcia, 2002). Swain (1985) has argued that the interlanguage performance of nonnative learners is off-target because restricted opportunities are provided for target language output in the classroom context, and because learners are not pushed while producing that limited amount of output. Production contributes to language acquisition through 1. Noticing the gap, 2. Practice opportunities it provides for hypotheses testing, and 3. Controlling the linguistic knowledge through reflection on output and syntactic processing.

Noticing the gap function of output is compatible with chaos complexity theory and is quite understandable with regard to nonlinearity of language learning process. Language learning is a nonlinear process in which the effect is disproportionate to the cause: "a simple trigger, one which occurs all the time, might be enough on any given occasion to bring about a great convulsion in the system (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). It is proposed that during speech production learners find out their communicative problems and realize deficiencies in their knowledge of the L2 (Swain, 1985). In other words, it is the output that can stimulate learners to move from the semantic open-ended strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production (Swain, 2000). From this perspective, recognition of communicative problems is likely to trigger cognitive processes that consolidate speaker's existing knowledge, and which, in turn, may stimulate hypothesis testing and reflection on syntactic processing (Anderson, 2000; Bialystok, 1982, 1990; Skehan, 1998).

Swain (1993) has also elaborated on the practice function of language production which might likely lead to fluency and accuracy improvements in oral speech. Likewise, de Bot (1996) has used the skill development model (Anderson,

1982, 1983, 1993) as a basis for emphasizing the same practice function for oral output. In his influential paper, he argued that output provides the learners with sufficient amount of practice at associative stage of skill development to proceduralize the declarative knowledge they had already learned at cognitive stage of langue learning. This prociduralization would aid them in gaining autonomy and enhancing both accuracy and fluency of their speech.

In line with previous research findings, Izumi (2002) has also highlighted the global consensus emerged from decades of research in L2 over output not just as the product of acquisition or the means by which to practice one's language for greater fluency but also as a potentially important casual factor in language acquisition/learning process.

Empirical Background

Various research studies in the last few decades have been undertaken to investigate how speech might be enhanced. A number of these studies have focused on the role of output in promoting speech (Izumi, 2000, Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara & Fearnow, 1999; Muranoi, 2005; Nobuyoshi & Ellis 1993).

Employing methodological focused tasks, Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993) have investigated whether "pushing" learners toward greater accuracy in their production leads to more accurate output and whether this contributes to acquisition. They collected data from 6 Japanese low-level learners of English, three of whom comprised the experimental group and the other three the comparison group. The participants performed two picture jigsaw tasks. The tasks were constructed to involve the use of simple past tense, e.g. describing events that happened the previous week, for task 1, and the day before at the office, for task 2. All six participants performed the two tasks twice. There was a one-week interval between the two treatment phases for both groups. In the first phase of the treatment, the experimental group received requests for clarification every time they produced an utterance in which the verb was not, but needed to have been in the simple past tense when the verb was incorrectly formed; or when the teacher genuinely failed to understand what the students had said. In the second phase of the treatment, students received general requests for clarification only when the teacher genuinely did not understand what the students had said. The participants in the control group received only general requests for clarification, none of which followed an incorrect use of past tense by students, in both treatment phases. The researchers found that all six learners produced a substantial number of errors in the first administration. In the case of the experimental group, two of the learners showed significant gains in accuracy during the second task performance. Clarification requests led these two learners to reformulate their output in a way that corrected their past-tense errors. In other words, when the teacher pushed these two learners in the direction of greater accuracy in their production, they were able not only to make self-repair but also to achieve a higher accuracy level in their output.

Izumi and Bigelow (2000) and Izumi et al (1999) have also investigated the role of output in triggering cognitive processes that affect noticing, and in focusing learners' attention on subsequent input and SLA. Specifically, these researchers sought to use output to enhance the noticing and learning of specific grammatical forms if input containing these forms was subsequently provided to learners. Focusing on English past hypothetical conditional, Izumi and Bigelow (2000) and Izumi et al. (1999) explored this issue by comparing the performance of two groups of learners: one group was given output opportunities and subsequent exposure to relevant input, and the other group received the same input merely for the sake of comprehension with no subsequent production opportunities. Both studies employed the same treatment procedure and types of tasks- a text reconstruction task and a guided essay writing task which were delivered in reverse orders in the two studies. The results showed a significant improvement of the target form only after the output for both types of tasks, which suggests the need for extended opportunities for producing output if it is to have a real effect on L2 learning.

In another study by Izumi (2002) the participants were the students who enrolled in the ESL programs at two major US universities. The target form in focus was English relative clauses. Four treatment groups and a control group were involved in this study with a pretest-posttest design. This study investigated the potentially facilitative effects of internal and external attention-drawing devices, output, and input enhancement on the acquisition of the target form. According to the findings, those engaged in the output-input treatment outperformed those exposed to the same input for the sole purpose of comprehension. Moreover, the effects of output on noticing and learning did not seem to be comparable to those of input enhancement (Izumi, 2002).

Muranoi (2005) believes that the findings emerging from Izumi (2002) clearly indicate that output practice coupled with relevant input can lead L2 learners to notice their linguistic problems under certain circumstances. Muranoi (2005) has also investigated the role of output as a triggering tool which promotes learners' syntactic processing skills and L2 learning. The study has showed that output encourages learners' syntactic processing skills but has not answered how syntactic processing had a facilitative effect on SLA.

In the face of empirical evidence that recognize the significant role of oral output in the process of language learning, the present study was conducted to integrate the findings from previous research studies focused on task planning and oral output. It was hypothesized that training learners to observe various fluency and accuracy strategies along with providing them with practice opportunities to produce output would improve both accuracy and fluency of their speech. This hypothesis was based on the conviction that training and production opportunities are two complementary conditions required for accurate and fluent speech. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Does oral output enhance the accuracy of intermediate Iranian EFL learners' task-based speech?

2. Does oral output enhance the fluency of intermediate Iranian EFL learners' task-based speech?
3. Does oral output enhance the breakdown fluency of Intermediate Iranian EFL learners' task-based speech?

II. Method

Participants

The participants in this study included 50 intermediate students learning English at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz Branch. The participant, with an age range of 20 to 24, received instruction for six sessions. The sample was selected out of a population of 70 intermediate students who took the Preliminary English Test (PET). Those whose scores ranged from 50 to 60 out of 65 were selected to participate in the study. Learners were randomly assigned as the non-output control group and the output experimental group.

Instrumentation

Five instruments were employed to obtain the research data. The Preliminary English Test (PET), including three sections of reading, writing, and listening with 65 items in general, was utilized to assess the initial homogeneity of the groups. The researchers, further, administered a task-based oral pre-test based on a picture strip with six pictures (Heaton, 1978). Another picture description task, with the same number of pictures, was assigned on the seventh session and after the treatment came to an end (Heaton, 1978). For both pre-test and post test tasks, the participants were allocated five minutes to describe and tape record their speech. Their speech was further transcribed and measured by two independent scorers.

The use of descriptive tasks was based on the belief that descriptive tasks promote form-meaning mapping process by pushing the learners to engage in greater syntactic processing and alerting them to possible knowledge gaps, which they might then fill by attending closely to the forthcoming input (Izumi, 2002). Furthermore, such tasks have been used in other studies of oral speech (Shehadeh, 1999b, cited in Shehadeh, 2002; Izumi, 2002), and thus, comparison of the results would be facilitated.

Procedure

The research was conducted in the language laboratory where the researchers taught both the experimental group and the control group how to attend to accuracy and fluency. All participants received instruction for six sessions. The teaching points presented each session included one grammatical structure, e.g. simple past, simple present, past continuous and present continuous tenses, as well as a dyfluency feature, e.g. repetition, false starts, reformulation and replacement which were explained through definition and examples. In addition, the participants were familiarized with some common natural filler such as um, oh, err, etc. that native speakers of English usually use while they are pausing during their speech. They were notified at the end of each session that incorrect use of the given tense and

overuse of dyfluency features and unfilled pauses make their speech inaccurate, influent, and therefore unnatural.

Both groups received the same type of instruction and were engaged in the same accuracy-oriented and fluency-oriented practice activities. The only difference between the two groups, which could be regarded as the experimental manipulation and the treatment, was the incorporation of some oral picture description activities during the last 10 minutes of each session merely in the experimental group.

Measures

In this study, the participants' oral output was the independent variable the effect of which was investigated on the two dependent variables: accuracy, and fluency of oral performance. To measure the influence of the independent variable on the two dependent variables, the researchers transcribed the data which were further scored by two raters. The inter-rater reliability of all pre-test and post-test accuracy and fluency measures were calculated and were acceptably high enough, above .90 percent for all measures.

The raters scored each transcript by counting the number of minimal terminal units (t-units) produced by the participants. Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) define each t-unit as consisting of one independent clause together with whatever dependent clauses attached to it. Following Skehan and Foster (1999), accuracy was measured by calculating the number of overall errors in all t-units and dividing them by the number of t-units. The ultimate score would be an indicator of inaccuracy; thus, the higher the score, the less accurate the language would be

Fluency, however, was estimated in terms of both dyfluency and breakdown fluency. Following Skehan and Foster (1999), the researchers measured dyfluency of L2 production by counting the number of repetitions, false starts, reformulations, and replacements per t-unit and dividing the sum of dyfluency measures by the number of t-units. The higher the number, the less fluent the language would be. To measure breakdown fluency, on the other hand, the researchers used a chronometer to measure mid-clause and end –of-clause filled and unfilled pauses longer than one second, added up the number of such pauses separately and divided the total number of each group by the number of t-units.

III. Results

The Pre-test

The main objective of the pre-test proficiency and oral tests was to assess the participants' initial comparability. To achieve this goal, the researchers conducted an independent t-test on the data from the proficiency test scores and the scores from the oral test the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics and Independent Samples t-test for the Pre-test Scores

	Mean	N	Std.	t	df.	Sig.
Control Pet	54.80	25	3.000	0.23	48	0.816
Case Pet	54.60	25	3.028			
Control Acc.	1.00	25	0.522	-.016	48	0.987
Case Acc.	1.01	25	0.530			
Control Dyflu.	1.05	25	0.831	-0.015	48	0.988
Case Dyflu.	1.06	25	0.830			
Control Mid-cl. FPs.	0.80	25	0.645	-0.395	48	0.695
Case Mid-cl. FPs.	0.88	25	0.781			
Control End- cl. FPs.	0.80	25	0.816	-0.170	48	0.866
Case End cl. FPs.	0.84	25	0.850			
Control Mid cl. UFPs.	0.96	25	0.840	0.171	48	0.865
Case Mid cl. UFPs.	0.92	25	0.812			
Control End cl. UFPs.	1.16	25	0.800	0.363	48	0.718
Case End cl. UFPs.	1.08	25	0.759			

As shown in Table1, no significant difference was observed between the mean of the experimental and the control groups in terms of the participants' general proficiency, accuracy, dyfluency, and breakdown fluency of their speech ($p<.05$). Thus, both groups could be initially regarded as homogeneous.

Oral Output and Accuracy

To answer the first research question, the researchers calculated the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of the accuracy measures obtained from the oral post-test, the results of which are presented in Table2.

Table2. Descriptive Statistics and ANCOVA Analysis for the Post-test Accuracy Measures

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	1.22	1	1.22	11.727	.001	.200
Error	4.88	47	.10			

	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	.94[a]	.06	.81	1.07
Case	.63[a]	.06	.50	.76

According to Table 2, the effect size was shown by "Eta Squared" as 0.200 and oral output had a positive effect on accuracy $\left(F_{(1,47)} = 11.727,\ P = 0.001\right)$. In other words, with controlling the effect of pre-test, oral output had 20 percent effect on accuracy. So, the answer to the first research question was positive. The participants in the experimental group with the mean of 0.63 produced less inaccurate forms and outperformed those in the control group with the mean of 0.94.

Oral Output and Dyfluency

To estimate the effect of oral output on the dyfluency of the participants' oral production, the researchers calculated the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of the post-test fluency scores. First, the number of dyfluency features (reformulations, replacements, false starts, repetitions) used by the participants was calculated and then, the total number was divided by the number of t-units. The participants with lower scores were regarded as more fluent. The results are presented in Table3 below.

Table3. Descriptive Statistics and ANCOVA Analysis for the Post-test Dyfluency Measures

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	1.79	1	1.79	38.247	.000	.449
Error	2.20	47	.04			

	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	.99[a]	.04	.91	1.08
Case	.61[a]	.04	.53	.70

As illustrated in Table 3, The "Eta Squared" showed the effect size of 0.44 and oral output had a positive effect on dyfluency $\left(F_{(1,47)} = 38.247,\ P = 0.000\right)$. That is to say, with controlling the effect of pre-test, oral output had 44.9 percent effect on fluency. The participants in the experimental group with the mean of 0.61 produced less inaccurate forms and outperformed those in the control group with the mean of 0.99. The answer to the second research question was positive.

Oral Output and Breakdown Fluency

Breakdown fluency was measured by counting the number of mid- clause and end-of-clause filled and unfilled pauses longer than one second and dividing the total number of each group by the number of t-units. The participants with higher results showed the least fluent performance. The researcher further conducted another analysis of covariance (ANOVA) to examine the probable significant differences between the groups. The results of the analyses of mid-clause and end-of-clause filled and unfilled pauses are presented below respectively.

Mid-clause Filled Pauses

As for mid-clause filled pauses, the results of the ANCOVA analysis in Table 4 indicated the positive effect of oral output on mid-clause filled pauses $\left(F_{(1,47)} = 36.968,\ P = 0.000\right)$. The effect size was shown by "Eta Squared" to be 0.44. That is, with controlling the effect of pre-test, oral output had 44 percent effect on breakdown fluency. The experimental group with the mean of 1.69 produced more filled pauses than the control group with the mean of 0.98 probably because they had more opportunity to produce language and to practice filling

pauses to avoid dyfluent speech. That is to say, the experimental group was more fluent than the non-output group.

Table4. Descriptive Statistics and ANCOVA Analysis for the Post-test Mid-clause Filled Pause Measures

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	6.36	1	6.36	36.968	.000	.440
Error	8.09	47	.17			
	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval			
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Control	.98[a]	.083	.81	1.15		
Case	1.69[a]	.083	1.53	1.86		

End-of-clause Filled Pauses

ANCOVA analysis of the end-of-clause filled pause measures, as presented in Table5 below revealed the positive effect of oral output on end-clause filled pauses $\left(F_{(1,47)} = 29.135,\ P = 0.000\right)$. The effect size was shown by "Eta Squared" to be 0.383. In other words, with controlling the effect of pre-test, oral output had 38.3 percent effect on breakdown fluency. The participants in the experimental group with the mean of 1.54 outperformed those in the control group with the mean of 0.93. Although they produced more pauses, they could use various fillers to fill the pauses to maintain the fluency of their speech.

Table5. Descriptive Statistics and ANCOVA Analysis for the Post-test End-of Clause Filled Pause Measures

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	4.65	1	4.65	29.135	.000	.383
Error	7.50	47	.16			
	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval			
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Control	.93[a]	.08	.77	1.09		
Case	1.54[a]	.08	1.38	1.70		

Mid-clause Unfilled Pauses

With regard to mid-clause unfilled pause measures, the results of the ANCOVA in Table6 below indicated the positive effect of oral output on mid-clause unfilled pauses as well $\left(F_{(1,47)} = 9.898,\ P = 0.003\right)$. The effect size was shown to be 0.174 by "Eta Squared". In other words, with controlling the effect of pre-test, oral output had 17.4 percent effect on breakdown fluency. The control group with the mean of 0.86 produced more unfilled pauses which can be regarded as signals of dyfluent performance and were thus less fluent than the experimental group with the mean of 0.53.

Table6. Descriptive Statistics and ANCOVA Analysis for the Post-test Mid-clause Unfilled Pauses

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	1.34	1	1.34	9.898	.003	.174
Error	6.39	47	.13			
	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval			
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Control	.86[a]	.07	.71	1.01		
Case	.53[a]	.07	.38	.68		

End-of-clause Unfilled Pauses

Finally, as for the end-of clause unfilled pause measures, the results of the ANCOVA in Table 7 below revealed the positive effect of oral output on end-of-clause unfilled pauses $\left(F_{(1,47)} = 13.369,\ P = 0.001\right)$. "Eta Squared" showed the effect size of 0.22. In other words, with controlling the effect of pre-test, oral output had 22.1 percent effect on reducing the occurrence of end-of-clause unfilled pauses and thereby on breakdown fluency. The mean score of the experimental and the control groups were 0.97 and 0.55 respectively. That is, the experimental group was more fluent than the non-output group because they managed to produce fewer end-of-clause unfilled pauses.

Table7. Descriptive Statistics and ANCOVA Analysis for the Post-test End-of-clause Unfilled Pauses

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	2.197	1	2.197	13.369	.001	.221
Error	7.725	47	.164			
	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval			
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Control	.97[a]	.081	.807	1.133		
Case	.55[a]	.081	.387	.713		

Based on the results obtained from the filled and unfilled pauses we can conclude that the answer to the third question was also positive; that is, the oral output produced by the participants enhanced the breakdown fluency of their speech.

IV. Discussion

The findings emerging from the present study confirm the facilitative role of oral output in enhancing accuracy and fluency of the participants' speech. The findings regarding the impact of oral output on accuracy are in line with the findings of Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993) who found that teachers might help learners enhance the accuracy of their speech by pushing them in the direction of greater accuracy in their production. The participants in their study were able not only to make self-repair but also to achieve a higher accuracy level in their output. In the present study, the researchers' presentation of English tenses each session set the

focus on accuracy for the learners and the descriptive picture descriptions tasks were some pedagogical devices to push the participants to produce the target form in their output. Practice opportunities offered thus led the participants to more accurate performance.

The findings are also compatible with the findings of Izumi and Bigelow (2000) who reported a significant improvement of the target form as a result of output for both text reconstruction and guided essay writing tasks. Both findings assert the necessity of engaging learners in oral production activities that might have a positive effect on the accuracy of their oral and written performance.

As far as the effect of oral output on fluency of speech is concerned, most previous research studies have been focused on various features of task performance, e.g. planning and training. In the context of Iranian EFL, Seifoori and Vahidi (2010) examined the impact of fluency strategy training as a device to achieve more balanced oral output under on-line planning condition. Participants in their study were two homogeneous classes of fifty Iranian English learners who received instruction for six sessions. The experimental group was taught how to use different fluency strategies to improve the fluency of their speech while planning on-line. The control group, however, did not receive any fluency strategy training. The results from the t-test analysis of the oral post-test data revealed significant differences between the groups in terms of fluency. Both the trained and untrained on-line planners did produce more accurate speech on the post-test, which was probably the impact of on-line planning. However, the trained on-line planners produced more fluent speech compared to the untrained on-line planners.

The findings emerging from the present study are congruent with those findings. In both studies, there was an intentional attempt on the part of the researcher to present and practice fluency features. Seifoori and Vahidi (2010) used fluency training as the experimental manipulation only in the experimental group and did not provide any training for the control group. As a result, the enhancement of fluency in the experimental group could be attributed to the training they received. Yet, in the present study, both groups received the same type of instruction and training for the same amount of time by the same teacher. The only difference was pertinent to the opportunities for oral output in the experimental group which must have helped the participants to achieve higher degrees of fluency. It seems that in case of equal training, what can make a difference to the ultimate outcome is practice opportunities for oral output.

V. Conclusion

The findings from the present study are bound to stir up controversy over implicit and explicit instruction. The advent of the Communicative Language Teaching marked an overemphasis on meaning and fluency-oriented activities which implied implicit teaching of language forms under exceptionally inevitable conditions only as the last resort. Iranian EFL learners, however, and most of the learners reported in previous research studies quoted here, seem to have benefited more from explicit instruction of various features which subsequently led to an

increase in the accuracy and fluency of their speech. This may suggest a common disposition on the part of at least foreign language learners toward explicit methods of teaching. This shared tendency seems partly explicable in terms of the contextual features that characterize the learning experiences in EFL contexts, e.g. lack of exposure to genuine communicative opportunities. The preference may also have some cultural or sociocultural roots which call for more ethnographic and process-oriented studies based on qualitative data.

Regardless of the underlying principles governing the pedagogical tendencies of the participants in this study, the findings, once again, suggest the necessity of taking into account the needs and preferences of any particular group of learners in planning instructional courses. What works in case of Iranian EFL learners seems to be explicit well-planned courses of instruction which address their weaknesses which, owing to severe restrictions on input, are not few.

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