Comparing the Effect of Individual and Group Pre-Task Planning on EFL Learners' Accuracy and Complexity in Speaking

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to compare the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' accuracy and complexity in speaking. To fulfill the purpose of the study, 60 intermediate female learners at the first grade of high school were chosen by means of a sample Preliminary English Test (PET) and randomly divided into two experimental groups of 30 students; the individual and the group pre-task planning groups which were provided with 15 tasks (personal, decision-making, and narrative tasks) over 16 sessions with the last one devoted to the posttest. The students in both classes were given the same planning time (two, three, and five minutes depending on the task complexity) but in one group, the participants carried out the task individually and in the other, they performed in groups of five. After the treatment, the two groups were given a posttest on a narrative task. After the planning time, all students were asked to discuss the task and the accuracy and complexity of their speech were measured. The results of the Mann-Whitney test indicated that whereas the individual planning group outperformed the group planning group in terms of speaking accuracy, the group planning learners performed significantly better than the individual planners in terms of complexity.

Key words: accuracy in speaking, complexity in speaking, individual pre-task planning, group pre-task planning

Introduction

Oral tasks are commonly used in second or foreign language classes, which are at times challenging for language learners. The reason seems to be that unlike writing tasks where learners can review and revise their output, an oral presentation demands online language processing. Therefore, students are

often given some time to prepare for their presentation prior to the conduction of the task. Ellis (2005) refers to such a preparation as strategic or pre-task planning. Over the past decade there has been a growing interest in the effect of pre-task planning on the subsequent performance. For example, Ortega (2005) claimed that one of the main benefits of strategic planning was that it enabled the learners "to access the upper limits of their interlanguage systems without time pressure, thus, making a wider linguistic repertoire available for subsequent on-line use" (p. 90). In other words, strategic planning reduces the cognitive pressure of online performance.

Moreover, researchers (e.g., Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996, 1999; Mehnert, 1998; Sangarun, 2005; Wendel, 1997; Wigglesworth, 1997; Yuan & Ellis, 2003) have manipulated various aspects of planning (e.g., planning time, foci, guided/unguided) in an attempt to investigate the effect of different task planning conditions on subsequent task performance. In this attempt learner's performance has been usually analyzed in terms of different dimensions of language production such as fluency, complexity, and accuracy.

The body of research has consequently shown that pre-task planning leads to more complex language production (e.g., Ortega, 1999), but the findings for accuracy are somewhat surprising. For example, a study by Foster and Skehan (1996), which investigated the effect of three conditions of individual planning (unplanned, detailed planning, and undetailed planning) on task performance, demonstrated that less detailed planning activity resulted in more accurate language production. Wendel (1997), who also found that pre-planned discourse was not significantly more accurate than unplanned performance, explained that accuracy might depend on online/ moment-by-moment processing while learners perform the task and not on the offline/pre-task planning.

Most planning studies so far have focused upon individual planning, in which participants are given time to plan in isolation and may take notes to ensure that they are mentally engaged. The rationale for this individual planning has been that such a planning provides a more dependable basis for initial studies since it is easier to control experimentally (Tuan & Neomy, 2007).

Foster and Skehan (1999), however, suggest that group planning may be more common in language classes than individual planning. They have, therefore, investigated and compared individuals and groups with and without planning in terms of their subsequent performance on a problem solving task.

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The researchers found that individual planning had the greatest influence on complexity and turn length. Of particular interest was the finding that performances following group planning were not significantly different from those following no planning. As a result, they concluded that whatever was happening in the group planning did not affect the learners' subsequent performance (p. 238).

On the contrary, Cook, William, Hill, and Canning (1990) state that allowing students to work in small groups encourages them to share and contributes to their language development. It also provides, as they claim, greater intimacy and involvement and the opportunity to respond to and act on what others say, which makes a better situation for developing students' listening abilities. Moreover, Cook et al. state that small groups enable students to teach each other explaining, questioning, imagining, and reminding in the language and through patterns of interaction which are frequently practiced and comfortable. Cook et al. further argue that students learn best if their intention to learn is aroused and that students are most likely to become   actively involved in the learning activities taking place in the classroom if they have time to explore how they learn and have a high degree of choice and responsibility for what, when, and how they learn.

However, only a few studies have investigated the nature of group planning. Donato (1994) investigated what happened in group planning in a French L2 class. During a one-hour planning session, the students had to prepare for the conclusion of a given scenario and then present their conclusion orally. Donato investigated how learners focused on linguistic items, and the nature of the group relations formed. He found that pre-planning encouraged learners to engage in what he termed 'collective scaffolding', that is, a pooling of linguistic resources. However, not all groups benefited equally from the opportunity to plan in groups. Donato found that there were more instances of collective scaffolding in groups working cohesively as collectives than in loosely knit groups. Subsequent research by Storch (2001, 2002) has confirmed that the nature of small groups (dyads) relationships is an important factor in terms of the opportunities for language learning group (and pair) interaction provided for the learners. However, Donato's study focused on the learners' negotiations and construction of linguistic items rather than the content of the presentation. Thus, it still remains unclear how beneficial group planning is to subsequent individual oral presentations.

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Accuracy and Complexity in Speaking

Accuracy reflects grammatical and lexical correctness and the L2 learners' efforts to control attentional resources in order to avoid errors in language (Ellis, 2005, p.15). Lennon (1990, p. 390) defines accuracy as "the ability to produce error-free speech". On the other hand, Complexity refers to the utilization of interlanguage structures that are 'cutting edge', elaborate, and structured. It is achieved by learners drawing on their rule-based system and thus requires systematic processing (Skehan, 1995). According to Ellis (2005, p.15), complexity entails more elaborate language, that is, the effect of risk taking on restructuring language.

As discussed above the findings of research on the positive impact of pre-task planning on complexity have been more conclusive than those on the accuracy. In other words, as mentioned above some studies (e.g., Foster & Skehan, 1996; Wendel, 1997) concluded that planning was not effective on accuracy, nevertheless Wigglesworth (1997), who investigated the effect of planning on the performance of different task types and at different proficiency levels in a language testing context, found that planning led to greater accuracy and complexity only on high-proficiency candidates and generally on the most demanding tasks (e.g., summary of a conversation). However, the results indicated that low proficiency candidates did not benefit from planning time. Wigglesworth suggested that this may have been due to the fact that the low proficiency learners did not use the planning time effectively or may have focused on the content rather than the language of their performance. However, later investigation by Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) advanced the proposal that guided planning that involves specific grammatical features may be a suitable pedagogical tool to be used with beginning levels in foreign language classrooms since this type of guided planning may lead to a balance between communication and grammar.

Crookes, in line with Wigglesworth (1997) found that planning opportunity resulted in significantly more complex language in terms of longer utterances, higher number of S-nodes per utterance, and more and longer subordinate clauses. Regarding accuracy, however, no support was found for the hypothesized favorable effect of the planning condition. Crookes (1989) concluded that a tension appeared to operate in the L2 production between complexity and accuracy, and that planning opportunity seemed to have a more powerful effect on language complexity than on language accuracy, in that the urge for complexity may undermine or weaken simultaneous efforts in achieving accuracy. This pay-off between complexity and accuracy led

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Crookes to the conclusion that no differences in accuracy are to be expected when learners are given opportunity to plan.

The controversy in the impact of pre-task planning led some researchers to focus on other variables that might influence this causal relationship. For example, Ortega (1999) argued that majority of the studies focused on the production rather than the process of planning and through her studies concluded that a number of factors such as task complexity, the degree of developmental readiness, learners' orientation toward meaning or form, and learners' proficiency level affected the quality of planning. Later, Ortega (2005) also investigated the strategies learners used while planning and discovered metacogintive strategies of advanced planning, performance evaluation, and production monitoring as well as cognitive strategies of writing for retrieval, avoidance, and translating.

On the basis of what was reviewed above, one can conclude that due to the fact that pre-task planning is an important phase in the accomplishment of a task, manipulating different variables in such a planning seems to be an important research orientation. Moreover, since in today's language classrooms tasks can be approached either individually or collaboratively in groups, teachers may need to know whether it is better to group the students for pre-task planning or encourage the learners to plan individually before they start doing the task. Consequently, comparing the effect of group and individual pre-task planning seems to be essential. Accordingly, in the present study, the researchers compared the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' accuracy and complexity in speaking. Therefore, the following null hypotheses were stated:

H_{01}: There is no significant difference between the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' accuracy in speaking.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference between the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' complexity in speaking.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 60 EFL students. They were all Iranian adult females, ranging in age from 14 to 16 who were at the first grade of

Nikan High School which is located in Aryashahr, Tehran. The participants were homogenized by a sample Preliminary English Test (PET) at the beginning of the term. As the classes were assigned for the teacher (one of the researchers), the sample was selected based on convenient non-random sampling.

After homogenizing the participants, they were randomly divided into two experimental groups of 30 students, one served as the individual pre-task planning group and one as the group pre-task planning group. Thirty other students who were studying in another first grade class in the same school served as the participants of the pilot study.

Instrumentation

Preliminary English Test (PET)

At the onset of the study, a sample of Preliminary English Test was used to homogenize 60 students among the 105 first grade students of the mentioned high school. The PET consisted of speaking section and 67 items in the reading, writing, and listening sections. The test had a total score of 75 and the administration of the test took 120 minutes. The mean of the scores was calculated and students who achieved between one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen as the participants of this study.

Posttest

A task which was selected by the researchers was given to the students at the end of the treatment. The task type was narrative which was supported by visual material, but which required some degree of organization of material by the students to orally tell a story. The participants in both classes listened to the teachers' description of the task and were told that they would receive a five-minute planning time during which they could think about what they would say when carrying out the task. The students in the individual planning group planned individually and those in the group planning group discussed the given task in groups. Each student had two minutes for the story-telling task itself.

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Top Notch (2a)

Top Notch is a six-level communicative English course book for adults and young adults with two beginning levels. Top Notch 2a by Saslow and Ascher (2006) was the course book which students studied in the mentioned language school during the term. It contains five units and each unit provides vocabulary, grammar, and social language contextualized in all four skills. During the treatment, one of the researchers taught the first three units.

Language Tasks

Fifteen tasks were given to the students during the term. The prototype tasks were based on the classroom materials which contained three task types following Skehan and Foster's (1999) classification: four personal tasks (based on the information that was well known to the participants and was therefore assumed to reduce the cognitive load of the task involved), six narratives (which were supported by visual material, but which required some degree of organization of material to tell a story effectively), and five decision-making tasks (which required the capacity to relate a set of reasons to a set of decisions that had to be made).

Procedure

Prior to the experiment, a sample of a Preliminary English Test (PET) was piloted among 30 intermediate EFL learners at the same school to make sure that it could be used confidently for homogenizing the target sample. Then the Preliminary English Test (PET) was given to 105 first grade high school students and 60 participants whose scores ranged between one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen as the participants of this study. The participants were randomly divided into two experimental groups of 30 students who formed the individual and the group pre-task planning groups.

Every session, a task was given to the participants as part of their regular classroom instruction. The instruction was carried out over 15 sessions and the 16th session was allocated to the posttest. The prototype tasks were based on the classroom materials which contained three task

types following Skehan and Foster's (1999) classification as already explained in the instrumentation section.

The participants in the individual pre-task planning group listened to the teachers' description of the task and were told that they would receive some time to plan (two, three, or five minutes depending on the task complexity) during which they could think about what they would say when they carry out the task. The participants in this group worked on the pre-task planning individually. After the planning time, two students were randomly asked to talk about the task.

However, the participants in the group pre-task planning group worked on the same task in groups with the same planning time and the same teacher's description of the task but were required to plan the given task in groups. For this purpose, the students were randomly assigned to groups of five students. The students carried out the tasks in groups, working with the same members during all sessions. At the end of the group work, two participants were randomly chosen from different groups to talk about the given task. Students in each group did not know in advance who was going to talk about the task after the group planning.

Pre-task planning was done with close teacher monitoring in both groups. The teacher observed students' work in order not to use their L1 in group discussions. If they wished, the students in both classes could take notes during the planning time, but the notes were taken away prior to the individual's speech after the task. During the individual's speech, the teacher gave feedback to both groups and made corrections.

As the posttest, an oral task the same as one of the task types used during the treatment period was selected by the researchers and was given to the participants in both classes at the end of the term. The task type was narrative and supported by visual material, but required some degree of organization of material to tell a story effectively. The participants in both classes listened to the teachers' description of the task and had five minutes planning time. The only difference in the posttest of the two groups was that the individual pre-task planning group did the planning in the posttest individually while group pre-task planning group carried out the planning in groups of five. The rationale for different conduction of planning in the posttest was that each group had a different experience during the treatment period and thus, the same context needed to be set for the posttest. After the planning time, all students were asked one by one to talk about the task, that

is, tell the story. All students' speech in both classes was audio recorded using a mini digital recorder.

Then the oral accuracy and complexity of each speech were measured in both groups. These measures have all been used in previous studies (e.g., Bygate, 2001; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Mehnert, 1998; Ortega, 1999; Skehan & Foster, 1999, 2005). Accuracy was measured by counting the number of errors per a hundred words. It was obtained by dividing participants' total number of errors by the total number of words produced and multiplying the result by 100. All errors in syntax and morphology or the lexical choice were counted including repetitions. Errors which were immediately self-corrected were not counted and errors in pronunciation were not included in the analysis. Complexity was counted by the number of lexical words divided by the total number of words and multiplying the result by 100 (Ortega, 1999).

The design to carry out this study was quasi-experimental since the participants were selected based on convenient non-random sampling. Independent variables of this study were individual pre-task planning and group pre-task planning. The dependent variables were accuracy in speaking and complexity in speaking. Finally, the control variables were gender and language proficiency.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of the Proficiency Test Piloting

The first step in the analysis of the result was to pilot the Preliminary English Test (PET). The PET consisted of 67 items including three sections of reading, writing, and listening. The test had a total score of 75 and the administration of the test took 120 minutes. This test was administered to a group of 30 intermediate EFL learners at the same school bearing almost the same characteristics as the target sample. All items went through an item analysis procedure and no item was discarded.

Following the piloting of the test, the mean and standard deviation of the raw scores and the reliability were calculated. The mean and the standard deviation of the scores obtained in this administration were found to be 58.97 and 10.44, respectively. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the PET in the pilot phase.

Table 1 – Descriptive statistics for PET (pilot study)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET SCORE Valid N	30 30	35.00	94.00	58.97	10.447

To ensure the reliability of the test, the researchers calculated the Cronbach Alpha and as it is shown in Table 2, the results came out to be 0.851, which was high enough for the test to be safely used for the main study.

Table 2 – Reliability for PET piloting

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.851	67

Descriptive Statistics of the PET Main Administration

The researcher used the piloted test as an instrument for homogenizing the participants of the study. The piloted PET was administrated among 105 intermediate first grade high school students and to ensure the homogeneity of the participants, 60 participants whose scores fell within the range of one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen. This procedure was done by using the individual control chart considering the area between one standard deviation above and below the mean $\mu \pm \sigma$. The control chart for the scores of 105 candidates on PET test is demonstrated below (Figure 1).

Based on figure 1, the mean of the scores for the 105 candidates on PET test came out to be 29.45, and UCL and LCL were found to be 39.91 and 19.00, respectively. Finally, 60 participants' scores were found in this range and the selected subjects were randomly divided into two experimental groups, each containing 30 participants. The descriptive statistics for PET before and after homogenizing are demonstrated in Table 3.
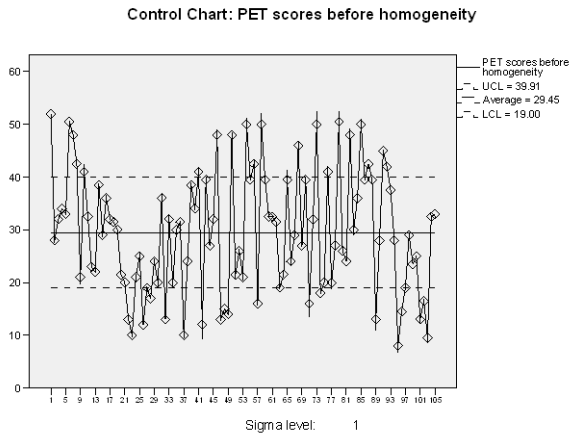
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Control Chart: PET scores before homogeneity

Figure 1 – Individual chart for homogeneity of samples

Table 3 – Descriptive statistics for PET scores before and after homogenization

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET Scores before homogenization	105	29.45	11.54
PET scores after homogenization	60	27.22	6.25

First the concentration and dispersion indices of variables were calculated. As demonstrated in Table 3, the mean and standard deviation of PET scores before homogenizing came out to be 29.45 and 11.536, respectively and the same index of PET scores after homogenizing came out to be 27.2167 and 6.25203, respectively. Thus, standard deviation of PET scores almost decreased to half which was the effects of homogenization. As it is depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below, it is clear that the homogeneity was effective and it caused a decrease in the dispersion of the scores.
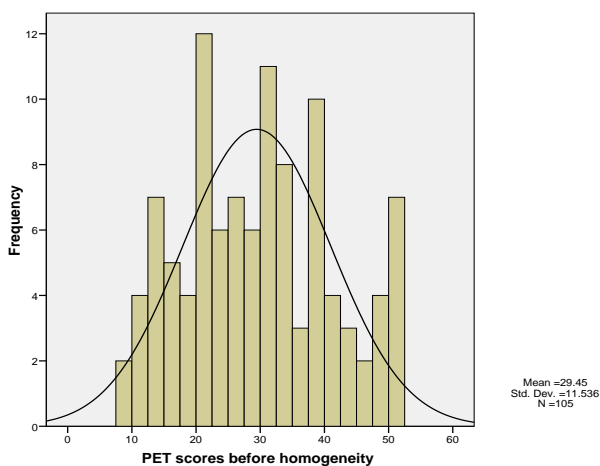
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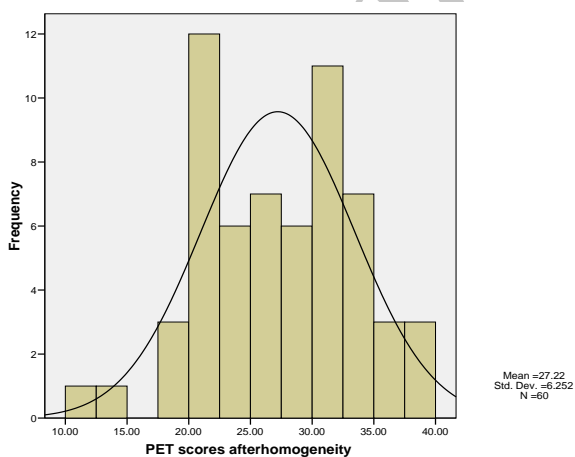**Figure 2 – Histogram for PET scores before homogenizing**

Figure 3 – Histogram for PET scores after homogenizing

The Measures of L2 Speech Production

Measures of accuracy and complexity were used in the present study to evaluate participants' oral performance. Accuracy was operationalized in this study in terms of the number of errors per a hundred words (based on studies

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by Fortkamp, 2000; Mehnert, 1998; Sangarum, 2005). It was obtained by dividing participants' total number of errors by the total number of words produced and multiplying the result by 100. All errors in syntax, morphology or lexical choice were counted, including repetitions. Errors which were immediately self-corrected were not counted and errors in pronunciation were not included in the analysis.

$$Accuracy = \frac{Participant's\ total\ number\ of\ errors}{Total\ number\ of\ words\ produced} \times 100$$

Complexity was counted by number of lexical words divided by total number of words and multiplying by 100 (Ortega, 1999).

$$Complexity = \frac{Number\ of\ lexical\ words}{Total\ number\ of\ words\ produced} \times 100$$

Descriptive Statistics of the Posttest

A task which was selected by the researchers was given to the students as the posttest. Table 4 demonstrates the descriptive statistics on the posttest and the results of the accuracy and complexity counts for both groups are demonstrated therein.

Table 4 – Descriptive statistics for all quantitative variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness
Accuracy Ind.	30	3.39	2.14	1.05	.43
Complexity Ind.	30	70.5	4.16	-.54	.43
Accuracy Group	30	2.13	.82	.032	.43
Complexity Group	30	87.07	1.32	-.02	.43

As Table 4 demonstrates, the mean of accuracy scores for the individual pre-task planning group came out to be 3.39 but the mean of accuracy scores for group pre-task planning group came out to be 2.13. In other words, the individual pre-task planning group performed better than the group pre-task

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planning group in terms of accuracy in speaking. However, the complexity mean scores for the group pre-task planning participants came out to be higher (87.07) than that of the individual pre-task planning group (70.5). Figure 4 demonstrates the comparative charts for individual and group planning accuracy scores.
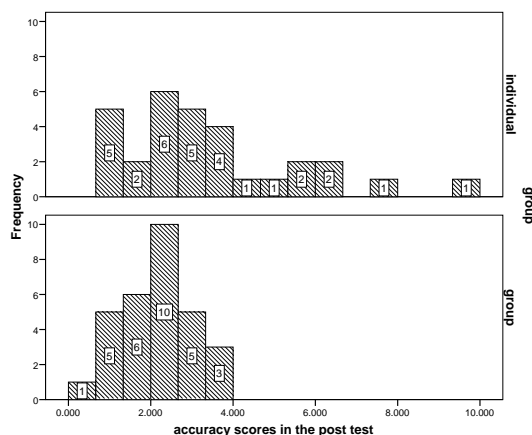

Figure 4 – The comparative charts of individual and group pre-task planning groups' accuracy scores

As it is shown in the above figures, there is a difference between individual and group pre-task planning in terms of their speaking accuracy. The accuracy scores of individual pre-task planning group were almost distributed between 0.00 and 6.00, whereas the ones for group pre-task planning group were distributed between 0.00 and 4.00. Figure 5 demonstrates the comparative charts of individual and group pre-task planning participants' complexity scores.

A difference between the complexity scores of individual and group pre-task planning groups is observable in Figure 5. Complexity scores of individual pre-task planning participants were placed between 60 and 80,

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whereas in group pre-task planning group these scores were placed between 80 and 90.
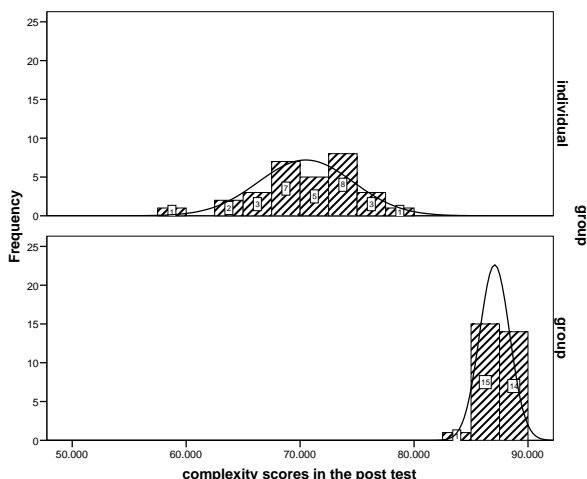

Figure 5 – The comparative charts of individual and group pre-task planning groups' complexity scores

Testing the Null Hypotheses of the Study

Since in this study the impact of one independent variable namely pre-task planning type was investigated on two dependent variables, complexity and accuracy in speaking and since the two dependent variables were related in being two different aspects of the same construct, namely speaking ability, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was needed to compare the two groups on their speaking in terms of accuracy and complexity. However, first the assumptions of MANOVA had to be checked. Table 5 reports the results of the test of homogeneity of variance for accuracy and complexity scores.

Table 5 – Levene's test of homogeneity of variance for accuracy and complexity scores

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Accuracy	12.59	1	58	.001
Complexity	18.86	1	58	.000

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
  a. Design: intercept+group

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As Table 5 indicates, the error variance was not homogeneous in the two groups in terms of the dependent variables ($F_{(1, 58)}$ = 12.59, p = 0.001 < 0.05 for accuracy) and ($F_{(1, 58)}$ = 18.86, p = 0.0005 < 0.05 for complexity). Thus, the assumption of homogeneity of variance for running MANOVA was violated. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 4, the skewness ratio came out to be 2.44 for the accuracy scores of the individual planning group, 1.26 for the complexity scores of the individual planning group, -0.07 for the accuracy scores of the group planning group, and finally -0.047 for the complexity scores of the group planning group. Among all the ratios the one for the accuracy scores of the individual planning group fell outside of the acceptable ±1.96 and thus not normally distributed. Therefore, the two assumptions of running MANOVA were violated. Furthermore, the researchers could not run two *t*-tests for comparing the two groups' accuracy and complexity scores either as the normality assumption for *t*-test was not observed. Consequently, the researchers were left with no option but running two Mann-Whitney tests as the nonparametric equivalent for the independent samples *t*-test. Table 6 demonstrates the mean ranks of the two groups for the accuracy scores.

Table 6 – The mean ranks of the two planning groups on the accuracy scores

	Planning Type	N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks
Accuracy	Individual pre-task planning	30	35.73	1072.00
	Group pre-task planning	30	25.27	758.00
	Total	60		

As Table 6 demonstrates, the individual pre-task planning group achieved a higher mean rank (35.73) on the accuracy than the group pre-task planning group (25.27). Table 7 demonstrates the results of the Mann-Whitney test which was used to investigate whether the difference in the two groups' mean ranks was significant or not.

Table 7 – The result of the Mann-Whitney test for comparing the mean ranks of the two planning groups on the accuracy scores

	Accuracy
Mann-Whitney U	293.000
Wilcoxon W	758.000
Z	-2.321
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.020

a. Grouping Variable: Planning Type

As demonstrated by Table 7, the difference between the two mean ranks came out to be significant (Z = -2.32, N1 = 30, N2 =30, p = 0.02 < 0.05). Therefore, the researchers were able to reject the null hypothesis that stated there was no significant difference between the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' accuracy in speaking.

As the next step, the same procedure was carried out for the complexity scores. Table 8 reports the mean ranks of the two planning groups on the complexity scores.

Table 8 – The mean ranks of the two planning groups on the complexity scores

	Planning Type	N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks
Complexity	Individual pre-task planning	30	15.50	465.00
	Group pre-task planning	30	45.50	1365.00
	Total	60		

As the results in Table 8 show, the group pre-task planning participant achieved a higher mean rank (45.50) on the complexity scores than the individual pre-task planning students (15.50). These mean ranks were then statistically compared by the Mann-Whitney test, the result of which is demonstrated in Table 9.

Table 9 – The results of the Mann-Whitney test for comparing the mean ranks on the complexity scores

	Complexity
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	465.000
Z	-6.653
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Table 9 shows that the difference between the mean ranks of the two groups on the complexity scores was significant (Z= -6.65, N1= 30, N2=30, p= 0.0005 < 0.05). Therefore, the researchers were also able to reject the second null hypothesis of the research which stated that there was no significant difference between the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' complexity in speaking.

Discussion and Conclusion

Many studies have been done on the effect of pre-task planning on students' language performance (e.g., Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996, 1999; Mehnert, 1998; Sangarun, 2005; Wendel, 1997; Wigglesworth, 1997; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). What research evidence has shown so far is that giving learners extended planning time before task performance seems to have beneficial effects for complexity, but the findings have been controversial for accuracy. For example, Yuan and Ellis (2003) found that whereas pre-task planning time promoted higher complexity and lexical variety, it did not have significant effects on accuracy. Therefore, different types of pre-task planning may influence different aspect of speaking in various manners.

The findings of the present study led to the rejection of the first null hypothesis which stated that "There is no significant difference between the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' accuracy in speaking" indicating that individual pre-task planning was significantly more effective than the group pre-task planning on the EFL learners' accuracy in speaking. Majority of the studies so far have demonstrated that pre-task planning is not very effective for accuracy as stated earlier in this paper (e.g., Crookes, 1989; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Moreover, those who found some evidence for a positive impact of strategic or pre-task planning on accuracy considered other variables such as language proficiency or task type.

For instance, Skehan and Foster (1997) found that undetailed planning boosted accuracy on the personal and narrative tasks but not on the decision-making tasks demonstrating the significant role of task type in the effect of pre-task planning on accuracy. Therefore, to interpret the results of the current study, it is necessary to reiterate that the posttest task in this study was a narrative task. Therefore, the higher accuracy of the participants in the individual pre-task planning group could be inferred as a greater focus of learners on their errors when they plan for a narrative task in isolation rather than in a group. Therefore, the question remains whether or not individual planning is also more effective than group planning for other task types.

The result of testing the second null hypothesis which stated that "There is no significant difference between the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' complexity in speaking" led to the rejection of this hypothesis indicating that group pre-task planning significantly affected the EFL learners' complexity in speaking. The results of research on pre-task planning are clearer for complexity as mentioned before. Majority of the

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studies have proved that pre-task or strategic planning positively influences complexity (e.g., Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Mehnert, 1998; Wendel, 1997; Wigglesworth, 1997; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). However, note has to be taken that some of these findings depended on the proficiency level of the participants, difficulty of the task, or the duration of planning.

For example, Wigglesworth reported that one-minute planning time led to more complexity in the case of high proficiency learners performing on the more difficult tasks. Or Mehnert found a positive effect only for the ten-minute planners with the one-minute and five-minute planners performing similar to non-planners. Therefore, the planning time which was five minutes in the posttest task of this study might have influenced the findings which indicated that learners produced more complex oral output when they planned in groups than in isolation. Moreover, the issue of type of task which was a narrative in this study might have affected this particular result.

The finding of this study about complexity, however, was in contrast with that of Foster & Skehan's (1999) who concluded that individual learner planning worked better for complexity than the teacher-led planning and group-based planning and that the learners' focus on form or content had no differential effect. However, since Sangarun (2001) found that only planning entailing attention to content led to increased complexity, it might have been the case that the participants in this study focused more on the content when planning in groups and more on the form when planning individually and thus the individual pre-task planning group outperformed the group pre-task planning group on accuracy due to their focus on form while they performed poorer than the group pre-task planning group on complexity due to their lack of focus on content.

Ultimately, it can be concluded from the findings of this study that when the focus is improving oral accuracy of intermediate EFL learners, the better practice is to encourage the learners to conduct the pre-task planning individually and when the objective is to increase their oral complexity, it is advisable to have the learners plan in groups. However, note has to be made that this conclusion is valid if learners are involved in a narrative task and have five minutes planning time.

With other planning durations, other task types, and with learners at other proficiency levels a different practice might be more effective, and to be able to identify and determine that effective practice extensive research is still required to investigate the interaction among the various factors that

influence the quality of pre-task planning and its subsequent effect on EFL learners complexity and accuracy in speaking.

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