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The Effect of Think-Pair-Share Interactional Tasks on Iranian EFL Learners' Speaking Accuracy and Fluency

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Abstract

Developing speaking accuracy and fluency remains a persistent challenge for many EFL learners, particularly in teacher-centered classrooms where opportunities for meaningful interaction are limited. To address this issue, this quasi-experimental study investigated the effect of Think-Pair-Share (TPS) interactional tasks on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. The study was conducted over 12 sessions across six successive weeks. Initially, 78 intermediate EFL learners took the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), and 42 learners whose scores fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected as the final participants. They were randomly assigned to two groups: an experimental group and a control group, each with 21 participants. The experimental group received TPS instruction, which required them to think individually about a topic, pair with a partner to discuss it, and share their ideas with the class. The control group, however, received conventional speaking instruction. Both groups took a pretest and a posttest. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS. The findings revealed that TPS had a statistically significant effect on speaking accuracy ($U = 82, p < 0.05$). Likewise, the results showed that TPS significantly improved speaking fluency ($U = 63, p < 0.05$), with the experimental group outperforming the control group in both measures. The findings may have implications for language teachers, syllabus designers, and materials developers seeking to enhance learners' oral proficiency through cooperative learning strategies.

Keywords: Speaking accuracy, Speaking fluency, Think-pair-share, Cooperative learning, EFL learners.

I | INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the four major skills required for communicating successfully in a second or foreign language, particularly when learners do not use their mother tongue. This ability is the practical use of language, through which individuals interact with others (Namaziandost & Ahmadi, 2019). According to Harmer (2008), speaking requires learners to utilize all available linguistic resources to convey meaning. Furthermore, speaking is a vital language skill that provides learners with the opportunity to participate in meaningful interaction, wherein they can articulate their viewpoints and respond to others (Richards, 2008; Ur, 2012). As Soleimani and Khosravi (2018) defines, speaking is a strategic process in which speakers use language to achieve a particular goal within a specific task. Masuram and Sripada (2020) state that tasks are useful instruments for engaging learners in the communicative classroom, where they become more creative and spontaneous and interact with one another to achieve desired outcomes. Tasks are activities that the target language learners use for communicative purpose to achieve an outcome.



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Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is an approach based on a collection of tasks rather than an ordered list of linguistic items. It draws on experiential and humanistic traditions (Nunan, 2004). In Task-based instruction (TBI), where meaning is the main concern, authenticity, language acquisition and development are taken into account (Skehan, 1998). It involves learners in constructing meaning, and there is substantial evidence that learners must be engaged in meaningful use of language in order to develop their proficiency. Based on Robinson (2005), "in a task-based syllabus, pedagogical task should be developed and sequenced to increasingly approximate the demands of real-world target task" (p.1).

While completing a task, students can work on it in pairs or small groups. Group work provides the opportunities for all learners to speak the new language, allows them to learn from each other, and frees the teacher to monitor individuals and give them feedback. The idea of group learning is not the same as learning in a traditional teacher-centered class with other peers. This learning approach includes creating learning groups within a classroom in which learners work together to solve a problem or complete a project (Altamirano-Pazmiño, 2019). In terms of cooperative language learning, Sharma and Saarsar (2018) describe cooperative learning as a teaching approach that requires learners to work together in groups to enhance both their own learning and that of their peers. This learning approach stands for a learning process or learning technique where learners are given opportunities to learn in a group, in a cooperative way. They share information with one another and support each other to acquire the essential knowledge, understanding, and practical skills required in their syllabus. (Sharma & Saarsar, 2018).

Given the above-mentioned issues, Think-Pair-Share (TPS) strategy proposed by Lyman (1987) gives all learners the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and ideas. TPS strategy was later developed on by Kagan (1991) to provide the teachers with flexible ways to apply cooperative learning. This is important because learners begin to build their knowledge in the discussion and to find out what they already know and not know. Millis and Cottrell (1998) state that TPS has many advantages over the traditional questioning structure. It is a useful way to improve learners' speaking ability particularly in discussion, because it increases the learners' ability in social interactions with their friends and helps them improve their power to analyze problems and find the solution. This study sought to take advantage of TPS interactional tasks to improve Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy and fluency.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical background

2.1.1. Speaking skills

Language as a unique property gives individuals the opportunity of exchanging ideas, emotions and feelings, and this exchange mostly occurs through speaking, which is a major language skill. Byrne (1986) defines speaking as "the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably, accurately and without hesitation" (p. 125). In another definition offered by Bailey and Savage (1994) describe speaking as a complex activity that involves the integration of multiple linguistic subsystems. They further argue that these demands make speaking in a second or foreign language particularly challenging, yet it is often regarded as the core skill by many language learners. (pp. 6-7). Lindsay and Knight (2006) note that people speak for a variety of purposes, including expressing feelings and opinions, exchanging information, responding to others, and engaging in social interaction.

Speaking holds a significant position in both formal language education and daily interpersonal communication; therefore, many language educators consider fluency to be a primary objective of speaking instruction (Hanzawa, 2024). Mahfouz and Ihmeideh (2011) introduced fluency via linking it to the creativity and imaginary use of language. Tamo (2009, p.31) asserts that "a person is a fluent speaker when he is capable of using the language structure accurately". Brumfit (1984) maintains that fluency involves more than just rapid speech; it encompasses the ability to use suprasegmental features effectively and to manage natural discourse phenomena such as pauses, fillers, and interruptions. In this view, interruptions are not signs of disfluency but rather features of authentic interaction that facilitate meaningful communication.

2.1.2. Speaking accuracy and fluency

As a matter of fact, accuracy and fluency are closely related and essential for successful communication. Krstinić (2020) asserts that these two factors (accuracy and fluency) can identify the success of EFL

learners in the future. Accuracy is the learners' ability to create correct sentences using correct grammar and vocabulary. It can be said that accuracy is relative, because young children are not capable of the same level of accuracy as an adult. Teachers who focus on accuracy help their learners to create grammatically correct written and spoken English. Krstinić also states that gap-fill exercises, grammar presentations, and frame dialogues are among typical accuracy activities.

As the other factor, fluency is the ability to speak a language easily and well (Hornby, 2005). Also, Krstinić (2020) describes fluency as learners' ability to read, speak, or write easily, smoothly, and expressively. According to Brown (1980), smoothness in speaking is achieved through effective clustering of speech and the use of reduced forms. In other words, the speaker can read, understand and respond in a language clearly and briefly while connecting the meaning and the context. Fluency is a developmental phenomenon that generally improves as learners gain more experience and move from elementary to more advanced stages of language learning. Role plays, games, speeches, and communicative activities are common fluency activities. Balancing the accuracy and fluency should be the major goal of English teachers (Krstinić, 2020). Scrivener (2005) defines accuracy as the ability to speak without making serious errors. He further suggests that, when accuracy is the focus, immediate teacher correction during speaking activities is appropriate.

2.1.3. Task-based language teaching

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), also known as task-based instruction (TBI) or task-based language learning (TBLL) is an approach that deals with the application of tasks as the major part of planning and teaching in language instruction. This approach puts emphasis on the application of authentic language and on requiring learners to do meaningful tasks utilizing the target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Nunan (2004) makes a distinction between real-world and pedagogical tasks. Real world-tasks or target tasks are those tasks that are used outside the classroom. When real-world tasks are changed to be used in classroom, they naturally become pedagogical tasks. Breen (1987) describes the instructional roles of a task as a range of work plans that have the overall aim of facilitating language learning, from the simple and brief exercise type, to more intricate and lengthy tasks, such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making.

TBLT has long been endorsed by several prominent scholars in the ELT field (e.g., Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1989, 2004; Prabhu, 1987; Willis, 1996). These proponents have striven to propose different definitions and models of TBLT in the ELT. For instance, Prabhu (1987) asserts that task is a kind of activity that requires learners' cognitive process (thinking) to fulfill the desirable result while the teacher plays the role as the controller of the process of the task. In line with Prabhu, Nunan (1989) defines task as a piece of classroom work, which engages students in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is specifically paid to the meaning rather than form.

2.1.4. Task types

Researchers have proposed various classifications of task types in SLA (Prabhu, 1987; Richards, 2006; Willis, 1996). Among the most commonly cited task types are information-gap tasks, which require learners to exchange missing information (Prabhu, 1987; Richards, 2006); reasoning-gap tasks, which involve deriving new information from given data (Prabhu, 1987); opinion-gap tasks, which require learners to express and justify their personal preferences (Prabhu, 1987; Richards, 2006); and problem-solving tasks, which engage learners in finding solutions to given problems (Pattison, 1987; Willis, 1996). These task types are widely used in task-based language teaching to promote meaningful communication and cognitive engagement.

Various task types involve visual stimuli. For instance, picture sequencing tasks require learners to arrange a set of pictures in a logical order to tell a story (Pattison, 1987), while spot-the-difference tasks engage learners in identifying discrepancies between two similar images (Willis, 1996). These tasks differ from information-gap activities, in which each learner holds a piece of information that must be shared to complete the task (Prabhu, 1987; Richards, 2006), and from jigsaw tasks, where learners combine information from different sources to construct a complete picture (Richards, 2006).

2.1.5. Think-pair-share strategy

One of the primary objectives of communicative language teaching is to enhance learners' communicative competence, which in turn encourages a greater willingness to speak. Therefore, researchers try to find the best and effective teaching strategies in order to help learners to develop their speaking skill. One of these influential strategies is the think-pair-share strategy. It has the potential to help learners improve their

speaking skill (Lyman, 1987). This learning strategy is designed to enable learners to formulate their ideas individually and share their thoughts and ideas with another student after thinking about a given topic. Think-Pair-Share, as a cooperative discussion strategy, was developed by Frank Lyman (1981) to motivate learner classroom participation. According to Lyman (1987), this cooperative learning strategy gives learners the opportunity to work together in pair and group to solve the problems or answer the posited questions. According to Lyman, the teacher poses a question that requires analysis, synthesis, or evaluation and gives learners approximately one minute to think and formulate an appropriate response. Lyman also states that learners have the opportunity to share their ideas and thoughts to answer the teacher's questions in the process of teaching and learning. Then, they turn to their partner and share their responses with each other.

As Lyman (1987) states, during the next step, student's responses can be shared within a group of four, within a larger group, or with the whole class during a follow-up discussion. This technique keeps all learners engaged in classroom and increases the quality of discussion, and gives all students the opportunity to learn by reflection as well as verbalization (Jones, 2006). This strategy reduces learners' fear of participating in class discussions by allowing them to think carefully about their responses and discuss the topic with a partner before being asked to share their ideas with the whole class. This strategy also helps those shy or tentative learners to focus on learning instead of simply being in the class. As Pimm (1987) states, the think-pair-share strategy promotes learners' personal communication to internally process, organize, and retain their thoughts and ideas.

2.1.6. Teaching speaking skills through TPS

Harmer (2001) asserts that language learners are mostly reluctant to speak because they are shy and are not prepared to express themselves in front of other people, particularly when asked to talk about personal information or opinion. According to Brown (2001), shyness and anxiety are viewed as the leading causes of learners' reluctance to speak. Many learners find it difficult to express their ideas verbally on a given topic in the classroom. If they have ideas, then the problem is that they do not know how to put their thought into phrases and sentences. While some learners may comprehend their peers' contributions, they may still struggle to produce meaningful oral output themselves.

According to Aeni (2020), the TPS technique has positive effects on learners' oral communication skills. It enhances critical thinking, provides opportunities for active participation, promotes learner autonomy, and increases self-efficacy and overall satisfaction with the learning experience. Considering the existing literature, TPS is known as an active learning strategy in which learners get an opportunity to improve critical thinking skills, to develop problem solving skills, and to improve communication skills as an efficient instrument for unleashing discussion among peers as well as teachers. As a result of its implementation in the teaching-learning process, a democratic environment is established in which learners participate without fear of teacher or peer criticism (Sharma & Saarsar, 2018).

2.2. Previous studies

Several studies have investigated the effect of TPS on learners' achievement and reported positive outcomes (e.g., Alpusari & Apriyandi Putra, 2013; Ifamuyiwa & Onakoya, 2013; Siburian, 2013). For example, Robertson (2006) carried out a study to find out the effects of TPS and Circle Chats on learners' interaction. Based on the research findings, it can be seen that Think-Pair-Share improved the students' interactions in the teaching and learning process. Hence, it gave learners the opportunity to practice English by discussing their ideas with a partner and increased the interaction among the learners while the teacher provided a variety of opportunities to interact and use English.

Alpusari and Apriyandi Putra (2013) examined the use of TPS, a cooperative learning strategy, to improve science process skills among Indonesian elementary school students. A total number of 21 students took part in the study. The participants' science process skills were assessed using a test that included seven evaluation criteria: observation, question, hypothesis, communication, inference, planning, and implementation. The results showed a significant overall improvement in science process skills. Among the seven criteria assessed, the greatest gain was observed in 'implementation,' while the smallest gain was related to 'hypothesis.' Interestingly, the only area that showed a decline was 'question.'

Sapsuha and Bugis (2013) employed a pre-experimental design to investigate the effect of TPS on reading comprehension. The participants were 23 eleventh-grade students from SMA Negeri Sawa, selected through random sampling. A reading comprehension test was administered to collect the data. The



findings confirmed the effectiveness of TPS in improving reading comprehension and revealed positive attitudes toward the technique.

Wang (2014) examined Chinese EFL learners who had problems in speaking English fluently and accurately, because their speaking competence was affected by cognitive, linguistic and emotional factors. Given this issue, the research was carried out to achieve learners' oral proficiency through evaluating three important models of teaching English speaking, and then proposing a four-step educational method: pre-speaking, while-speaking, post-speaking and extension activity. In the pre-speaking stage, students needed to acquire sufficient content knowledge and vocabulary, as well as strategies to manage and reduce their anxiety. In while speaking phase, learners should have adequate time to improve their fluency, with overall attention to delineate their meanings. In after speaking stage, learners were given opportunities to figure out the correct use of language to promote their speaking accuracy. Finally, extension practice improved learners' language use because task repetition helped learners to speak English fluently and accurately.

In a study, Raba (2017) made an attempt to explore the effect of TPS on EFL learners' oral communication skills. To this end, some EFL teachers were interviewed. They taught English for Workplace at the English Language Center, An-Najah National University were interviewed. The researcher also observed learners' classroom interaction. The analysis of the collected data showed that the TPS strategy had a positive effect on learners' oral communication skills by creating cooperative learning conditions and increasing their motivation to learn. The TPS strategy helped learners become more cooperative and enabled them to enjoy interacting and working with their peers and teachers. Moreover, TPS improved learners' self-confidence. The shy and embarrassed learners began to speak and express themselves gradually.

Nugraha et al. (2018) conducted a quasi-experimental study with a one-group pre-test post-test design to examine the impact of TPS on self-efficacy among 25 junior high school students. Although their study focused on mathematics, their findings are relevant to the present investigation as they demonstrate that TPS can enhance learners' self-efficacy—a factor closely linked to willingness to communicate and oral participation in language classrooms.

In another study, Hasibuan (2019) investigated the effect of implementing TPS technique on learners' reading skills through conducting classroom action research. The participants were 24 junior high school students from Panyabungan, Indonesia. The research included two cycles; each cycle consisted of the following phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The findings also indicated that the students were more interested and enthusiastic about reading the text when the TPS technique was used.

Zohrabi (2020) also investigated the role of TPS interactional activity on improving Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate through a mixed-methods design. Nine upper-intermediate female learners took part in the study. During five sessions, voice recording and a willingness-to-communicate questionnaire were administered. The results showed that while the frequency of turn-takings and interruptions varied across sessions and between groups, an overall upward trend was observed in the participants' willingness to communicate. Moreover, the findings of the questionnaire indicated that learners' perceptions were more promising in posttest in comparison with the pretest. Finally, it was revealed that the willingness-to-communicate of EFL learners in the fifth session was significantly higher than their performance in the first session.

Considering the speaking skills, Benjelloun (2021) carried out a research study to probe the role of TPS in improving speaking skills of Moroccan university students in online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pre- and post-speaking tests, students' self-evaluation, and classroom observations were used as the research instruments to collect the required data. The findings of the study indicated that the TPS strategy enabled predominantly average and weak learners to interact their views on a range of familiar subjects with more ease, confidence, and fluency using more accurate and proper vocabulary and a clearer organization of ideas. Although the learners still had problems with their pronunciation and accurate grammar, they performed better interactive communication.

In another study, Brillianzha (2021) attempted to find the effect of TPS technique on improving learners' speaking skills. To this end, a total of 20 eight-grade students took part in the study. The data was collected through observations, interviews, and tests. The analysis of the data indicated that using TPS technique was effective in improving learners' speaking skills. The findings also showed some improvements in learners' comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, gesture, and expression.

A review of the previous literature shows that many studies have been carried out to explore the effectiveness of the TPS in improving different language skills. However, the simultaneous effect of TPS on both speaking accuracy and fluency has received less attention in the existing literature. Therefore, this study was an attempt to determine the effect of TPS interactional tasks on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. The findings of the current research can enrich the existing literature and help EFL learners to improve their motivation and confidence while reducing their anxiety.

2.3. Research questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study and to investigate the effectiveness of TPS interactional tasks on Iranian EFL learners' oral proficiency, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: Does using think-pair-share interactional tasks have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy?

RQ2: Does using think-pair-share interactional tasks have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency?

2.4. Research hypotheses

Given the above posited research questions, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H01: Using think-pair-share interactional tasks does not have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy.

H02: Using think-pair-share interactional tasks does not have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

Through convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, 78 Iranian intermediate EFL learners studying general English at a private language institute in Hamadan, Iran, were selected as the initial sample of the study. All the participants spoke Persian as their first language. Their aged from 17 to 22 years. To ensure their homogeneity, the Oxford placement test (OPT) with 60 items was administered. After analyzing the collected data of the OPT, 42 learners whose scores fell between one standard deviation above and below the mean (mean = 41.28 and standard deviation = 3.11) were selected as the participants of the study. Based on the OPT scores, the selected participants represented a relatively homogeneous group whose scores clustered around the upper-intermediate proficiency range. Their scores ranged from 37 to 47, with a mean of 41.28 (SD = 3.11). The selected participants were then randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of 21 learners. The experimental group received instruction through Think-Pair-Share (TPS) interactional tasks, whereas the control group received teacher-centered speaking instruction based on the institute's regular curriculum, without the use of TPS interactional tasks.

3.2. Data collection instruments

To achieve the objectives of the study, certain instruments were used.

3.2.1. Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

In order to homogenize the participants of the study in terms of language proficiency, an OPT was administered. This test is a quick and easy to administer test to assess the approximate level of learners' knowledge of English grammar, vocabulary and reading. The allocated time to complete the test was 60 minutes. There were two parts with 60 multiple-choice items and cloze tests. The first part consisted of 40 questions, and the second part had 20 questions. There was no negative point for incorrect answers. Table 3.1 indicates the OPT interpretation based on OPT ranking developed by Cambridge.

Table 1. Oxford placement test ranking

Beginners	Elementary	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	Very advanced
1-17	18-27	28-36	37-47	48-55	56-60

3.2.2. Preliminary English test (PET) speaking part

To measure the participants' speaking accuracy and fluency, two sets of speaking part of the PET were administered with one serving as the pretest carried out before the treatment and the other as the posttest at the end of the treatment. The test involved participants in showing that they were able to



communicate effectively in everyday situations. The participants were not required to explain scientific or economic concepts; rather, they were expected to talk about everyday topics, such as family, friends, work, travel, and social life. Before starting the treatment procedure, the speaking test was administered as the pretest to assess the participants' initial speaking proficiency, and it was used as the posttest after the treatment sessions to measure any improvement in their speaking accuracy and fluency. This test was administered individually and face-to-face. It took 10-12 minutes to be administered. The test consisted of four parts and each part took 2–3 minutes.

Speaking part 1: It consisted of interviews with short questions and answers. The participants were asked a couple of personal questions. Each interview was individual and lasted for 2-3 minutes. The examiner asked a personal question or two about a common topic like their hobbies. The answers had to be extended beyond a couple of words, but they did not need to be too long.

Speaking part 2: It was based on taking long turns and was individual too. The participants described a picture in detail for about a minute. Candidates were expected to organize their ideas using linking devices, such as and, but, so, however, and also. This part also provided an opportunity for participants to demonstrate their vocabulary knowledge. The participants were asked to describe the picture in as much detail as possible, using their best available language. It should be mentioned that the topics for this part of the exam were normally related to everyday activities, and the pictures included people doing things.

Speaking part 3: As a collaborative task, the participants needed to speak with their partners. The examiner gave them a set of pictures and described a situation to them. The participants then had to discuss the options in the pictures with their partners for 2-3 minutes. They could talk about which ideas were good or bad before making a decision about the best option. In this section, interaction between each participant and his or her partner was essential.

Speaking part 4: It was a discussion part in which the participants were asked a series of questions by the examiner. These questions were always based on the same topic as in the previous stage. For instance, the topic of Part 3 was educational problems, and the discussion in Part 4 followed the same theme. Sometimes the examiner asked them a question directly in this part of the exam to encourage the learners to talk together with their partner. This part was more difficult than the previous parts of the exam.

3.2.3. Scoring rubrics

To reduce the subjectivity of the scoring of the speaking test, we considered it essential to use an analytic rating scale. In order to score the participants' speaking test, an appropriate rating scale (IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors) was applied to score the participants' accuracy and fluency in speaking. This scoring system was used to measure and report scores in a consistent manner. The band descriptors described performance in four categories including Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy, and Pronunciation. To fulfill the objectives of this study, the fluency and accuracy dimensions of the learners' oral performance were taken into consideration. The speaking band score ranges from zero to nine. For example, scoring a band 8 shows that a learner has an excellent command of English. The participants' oral performance was scored based on the two criteria directly relevant to the dependent variables of the study, namely fluency and accuracy, as per the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors. To score the participants speaking accuracy and fluency, two raters scored the tests to decrease the subjectivity of scoring as much as possible and each participant's score was the average of the scores given by the two raters. The inter-rater reliability index, indicating the degree of agreement between the two raters, is reported in the Results section.

3.3. Data collection procedure

The current study was carried out during a 12-session treatment. The first and the second sessions were devoted to pre- and post-tests administration. To collect the required data and to test the research hypotheses, the following steps were taken. After the initial sample of the study was selected through convenience sampling, the OPT was given to all the 78 EFL learners. This test was administered two weeks before the experiment. Considering the participants' scores on OPT, 42 learners who scored one standard deviation above and below the mean (± 1) were chosen as the sample of the study. Based on the OPT scoring guidelines, the selected participants scored between 38 and 47, placing them at the upper-intermediate level of proficiency. The selected participants were randomly assigned to two experimental and control groups each including 21 learners. The experimental group received the instruction through TPS interactional tasks, and the control group received the traditional instruction to improve their speaking

fluency and accuracy. The next step was the administration of PET speaking test as the pretest to both groups to assess their speaking fluency and accuracy. These steps are described in detail below.

3.3.1. Pretest and posttest administration

To assess the participants' speaking accuracy and fluency before and after the treatment, two sets of PET as the pretest and the posttest were administered to both research groups. The speaking test lasted about 10-12 minutes for each participant. It was administered face-to-face to make the test more realistic and more reliable. To enhance reliability, the participants' oral responses on both the pretest and posttest were recorded and transcribed. The tests were scored by two raters who were trained by the authors to follow the relevant rating scale. The test was carried out based on the following steps.

At the first step, the participants were asked to introduce themselves. Some general questions were asked. Then, they were required to speak about the given topic and the follow-up questions. At the third step, they were given photos and asked to talk about those photos and answer the follow-up questions. At the final step, the participants took part in a dialogue with the test giver to arrange for a social event.

3.3.2. Treatment procedure

Prior to the treatment, the teacher explained the TPS strategy and its purpose to the participants and provided them with guidelines for the discussions. She explained that they would 1) think individually about a topic or answer to a question, 2) pair with a partner and discuss the topic or question, and 3) share ideas with the rest of the class. Then, she asked one of the students in the classroom and modeled the procedure to ensure that all the students understood how to use the strategy. Next, she gave the participants time to ask questions that clarified their use of the technique.

The teacher then asked a question, and the learners started to think silently about their answers. They had time to take note of their response before discussing it with their pair. Then, the response was submitted to the teacher before the learners continued to work in pairs. The teacher then paired the learners and asked them to discuss their answers. Regarding the result of the discussion, each pair concluded and produced their final answer. At the final step of TPS, the teacher asked the pairs to share the result of their discussion or their responses, within the learning team, with the rest of the class. The teacher then asked the pairs to share their thinking with the rest of the class. In this phase of the treatment, a large discussion occurred and each pair attempted to find similarities or differences of the response or opinions from different pairs. This cycle was repeated in the next sessions. The teacher gave the learners time to discuss a topic or answer a question. The teacher controlled and checked the participants' mistakes while they were speaking. The learners also received feedback and correction on their speaking mistakes during the tasks.

However, the control group received no treatment and followed the traditional speaking activities including memorizing the conversations, repetition, role-play, etc. After a ten-session treatment, the speaking posttest was administered to both groups. To minimize subjectivity and personal bias, the learners' responses were evaluated in terms of fluency and accuracy using the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors, with each component scored from 0 to 9. The researcher asked two raters to score the participants' speeches using the speaking rubric.

3.4. Data analysis

In order to find the effectiveness of the treatment and the learners' achievement, after collecting the data from the OPT, the pretests, and the posttests, we entered the data into SPSS and analyzed them both descriptively and inferentially. To answer the research questions, we first ran the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check the normality of the data. Since the data were not normally distributed, we employed the Mann-Whitney U test to analyze the collected data and empirically test the research hypotheses. The detailed results are presented in the following section.

IV. RESULTS

In this section, the results of the language proficiency test and the descriptive statistics for both groups are presented.

4.1. The result of the language proficiency test

In order to have homogenized participants in terms of their general English language proficiency, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered. The descriptive statistics for the OPT are displayed in Table 4.1.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of the Oxford Placement Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Oxford_Test	78	31.00	52.00	39.10	5.28
Valid N (listwise)	78				

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the OPT test. As it can be seen, the mean and the standard deviation of the participants were 39.10 and 5.28, respectively.

Based on the OPT scores, 42 participants with scores ranging from 37 to 47 were selected as the final sample. They were then randomly assigned to two groups (experimental and control), each consisting of 21 members. The next table shows the descriptive statistics of the homogenized participants.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the homogenized participants

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Homogenized	42	37.00	47.00	41.28	3.11
Valid N (listwise)	42				

As it can be seen in Table 3, the mean and the standard deviation of the homogenized participants were 41.28 and 3.11, respectively.

4.2. The result of the inter-rater reliability

In order to find whether there was agreement between the two raters, the inter-rater reliability was calculated.

Table 4. Inter-rater reliability for the two raters in a pilot study

Title	No. of raters	No. of participants	R
Speaking accuracy	2	21	0.890
Speaking fluency	2	21	0.885

To ensure scoring consistency, we first conducted a pilot study with 21 participants to estimate inter-rater reliability between the two raters. Table 4 presents the results of this pilot analysis. The same procedure was then applied to score the main participants' oral performances. As it can be seen, there was a high agreement, based on Landis and Koch's (1977) classification, between the two raters of the research: $R = 0.89$ and $R = 0.88$ for the accuracy and fluency, respectively.

4.3. The effect of TPS on speaking accuracy

The first research question of this study was aimed at finding if using think-pair-share interactional tasks could have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy. The following table presents the descriptive statistics for the pretest and posttest scores of both groups.

Table 5. The two groups' pre- and post-test scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Con_accuracy_pre	21	4.00	6.00	5.1905	0.67964
Con_accuracy_post	21	5.00	6.00	5.3333	0.48305
Exp_accuracy_pre	21	4.00	6.00	5.0238	0.60159
Exp_accuracy_post	21	5.50	7.00	6.1429	0.52780
Valid N (listwise)	21				

As it can be observed in Table 5, the mean scores for the pretest and posttest of the control group were 5.19 and 5.33 while the mean scores for the pretest and posttest of the experimental group were 5.02 and 6.14, respectively.

Given the quasi-experimental design of the study, we first compared the pretest scores of the two groups to ensure their initial comparability. The results indicated that the two groups did not differ significantly at the outset; therefore, we proceeded with gain score comparison. However, before running ANCOVA, certain assumptions had to be checked. Table 6 below shows the result of the normality test.

Table 6. Normality the test results for the accuracy scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
	Statistics	df	Sig.
Con_accuracy_pre	0.277	21	0.000
Con_accuracy_post	0.422	21	0.000
Exp_accuracy_pre	0.325	21	0.000
Exp_accuracy_post	0.273	21	0.000

The result of the Kolmogoro-Smirnov test of normality shows that the data were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). Given the violation of the normality assumption, we opted for gain score comparison as an alternative analytical approach. The gain score comparison, which is the difference between the posttest and the pretest, was taken into account. Table 7 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the gain scores of the two groups.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for the gain scores of the two groups (accuracy)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Gain control	21	-1.00	2.00	0.1429	0.85356
Gain experimental	21	-0.50	2.00	1.1190	0.61043
Valid N (listwise)	21				

The mean and standard deviation of the control and the experimental groups were 0.14, 0.85 and 1.11, 0.61, respectively. Table 8 shows the result of the test of normality for selecting an appropriate inferential test.

Table 8. Test of normality for the accuracy scores of the two groups

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
	Statistics	df	Sig.
Gain control	0.233	21	0.004
Gain experimental	0.244	21	0.002

The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality showed that the data were not normally distributed for the two sets ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the appropriate test for the mean comparison was the Mann-Whitney U test. The result of the inferential test is shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Results of the Mann-Whitney U test for the comparison of the two groups

	Gains
Mann-Whitney U	82.000
Z	-3.610
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

Based on Table 9, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups ($U = 82$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that the use of TPS interactional tasks had a statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy. The experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in terms of speaking accuracy.

4.4. The effect of TPS on speaking fluency

The second research question of this study was aimed at finding if using think-pair-share interactional tasks could have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency. Table 10 shows the descriptive statistics of the pretests and posttests of the two groups.



Table 10. Descriptive statistics for the pretests and posttests scores of fluency

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Con_fluency_pre	21	4.00	6.00	5.0000	0.44721
Con_fluency_post	21	5.00	6.00	5.3095	0.46033
Exp_fluency_pre	21	4.00	6.00	5.1190	0.44454
Exp_fluency_post	21	5.50	7.50	6.3571	0.52780
Valid N (listwise)	21				

As it can be observed in Table 10, the mean scores for the pretest and posttest of the control group were 5 and 5.30, while the mean scores for the pretest and posttest of the experimental group were 5.11 and 6.35, respectively. Given the quasi-experimental design, we first compared the pretest scores of the two groups to confirm their initial comparability. The results indicated no significant difference between the groups at the outset; therefore, we proceeded with gain score analysis. However, before running ANCOVA, certain assumptions had to be checked. Table 11 shows the result of the test of normality.

Table 11. Result of the test of normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
	Statistics	df	Sig.
Con_fluency_pre	0.405	21	0.000
Con_fluency_post	0.416	21	0.000
Exp_fluency_pre	0.415	21	0.000
Exp_fluency_post	0.227	21	0.006

The result of the Kolmogoro-Smirnov test of normality showed that the data were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). Since the data did not satisfy the normality assumption, we proceeded with gain score analysis. The gain scores were derived by subtracting the pretest scores from the corresponding posttest scores for each participant. The descriptive statistics of the gain score of the two groups are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Descriptive statistics for the gain scores of the two groups (fluency)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Gain Control	21	-1.00	1.00	0.3095	0.55848
Gain Experimental	21	-0.50	2.50	1.2381	0.64457
Valid N (listwise)	21				

The mean and standard deviation of the control and the experimental groups were 0.30 and 0.55 as well as 1.23 and 0.64, respectively. Table 13 shows the result of the test of normality for the selection of an appropriate inferential test.

Table 13. Normality test results for the fluency scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
	Statistics	df	Sig.
Gain control	0.329	21	0.000
Gain experimental	0.213	21	0.014

The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality showed that the data were not normally distributed for the two sets ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the appropriate test for the mean comparison had to be the Mann-Whitney U test. The result of the inferential test is shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Result of Mann-Whitney U test for the comparison of the fluency scores of the two groups

	Gains
Mann-Whitney U	63.000
Z	-4.113
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

Based on Table 14, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups ($U = 63$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that the use of TPS interactional tasks had a

statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency. The experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in terms of speaking fluency.



V. DISCUSSION

The current study was an attempt to find the effect of think-pair-share interactional tasks on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. As mentioned earlier, TPS provides learners with sufficient time and a clear three-step framework including thinking individually, pairing with a partner to discuss, and sharing ideas with the class. This facilitates structured and meaningful interaction. To answer the research questions and effectiveness of the treatment, the study employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest research design. To analyze the collected data, the SPSS program was used. Since the data were not normally distributed, the Mann-Whitney U test for the comparison of the groups was run. To find the possible agreement between the two raters, the inter-rater reliability was calculated. There was high agreement between the two raters, with $r = 0.89$ for accuracy and $r = 0.88$ for fluency.

To answer the first research question, namely whether using think-pair-share interactional tasks have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy, the data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. The findings showed that using TPS interactional tasks had a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy. The experimental group proved to be better than the control one. It indicates that using activities in a group or pair can be effective in improving learners' speaking accuracy (Oradee, 2012). Interaction plays a crucial role in speaking development because it engages learners more directly with the teacher and the instructional content. When the learners were actively involved in the tasks, they paid closer attention to the teacher and their peers and engaged more meaningfully with the language used in the classroom.

The finding related to the first research question was in line with the findings reported by Brillianzha (2021), which revealed that the TPS technique improved the participants' speaking skills. The technique provided the participants with more opportunities to speak in English. There was also an active participation among the learners during the teaching and learning process. The finding related to the first research question was supported by the finding reported by Putri et al. (2020). They found the positive role of TPS in improving learners' speaking ability, particularly in short monologues. The result of the current study was also in line with the result reported by Dogolsara et al. (2019). Their findings showed that the task variations (an integrated method of learner-to-learner interactions) were effective on the two features of accuracy and complexity of EFL learners' oral performance.

To answer the second research question, namely whether using think-pair-share interactional tasks have any statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency, after checking the normality of the data distribution, the researcher used the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test to compare the speaking fluency of the research groups. The results showed that TPS interactional tasks had significant effects on improving Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency. The experimental group outperformed the control group in the posttest. It reveals that interaction with the teacher or students, including interactive tasks, such as discussion and conversations can help learners to improve their speaking fluency. By using interactional tasks and TPS strategy, there is an opportunity for group and pair work. The participants become engaged in spontaneous conversations, and they participate for actual purpose but not for artificial ones. Therefore, the type of task used in this study affected the learners' performance positively. Tasks in general and interactional tasks in particular make learners ready for the real world outside the classroom. According to Ellis (2003), instructional tasks are important constituents of the language learning context, "holding a central place" in the learning process (p. 1).

The result related to the second research question was supported by Masuram and Sripada (2020) who found that learners' speaking fluency was improved using task-based teaching. They also showed that communicative and interactional tasks engaged the learners and improved their language exposure, use, and motivation. The finding also was in agreement with the findings reported by Zohrabi (2020). He found that TPS interactional activities could improve the learners' willingness to communicate in English.

It is worth mentioning that the outcomes of this study are supported by those reported by Usman (2015), which revealed the positive effect of using TPS in improving learners' speaking ability. This finding is also consistent with the evidence provided by Wang (2014), who examined Chinese EFL learners with

difficulties in speaking English fluently and accurately. Wang's study showed that TPS improved the learners' language use, as task repetition helped them to speak fluently and accurately. Similarly, the conclusions drawn by [Sharma and Saarsar \(2018\)](#) are in agreement with the present study; they identified TPS as an effective learning strategy for facilitating discussions in classroom interactions.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study used the TPS technique and some additional interactional tasks, such as giving and receiving feedback, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar practice, to promote learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. These activities helped the learners increase their participation that encouraged them to give contribution actively to the lessons. Giving suitable topic to be discussed in groups was effective to improve their social skills and higher-level of thinking. The findings of the study showed significant changes in the learners' oral fluency and accuracy. The interactional tasks and the TPS steps used in the treatment increased the participants' enthusiasm in the speaking activities and improved their oral communication.

TPS is a teaching and learning strategy that focuses on learner-centeredness. In this technique, learners can work in pairs or small groups. Using this technique, they can have the opportunity to work together, providing help to others while performing the activity. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that organizing learners into pairs improved their confidence in producing the language. They were taught to use the language functions appropriately. It is also concluded that, when learners engage in discussion within small groups, they retain the content more effectively than when they passively receive information. The TPS strategy works best with smaller groups ([Lyman, 1981, as cited in Zohrabi & Jafari, 2020](#)). These groups are less threatening to most participants, and this condition is helpful for learners to discuss their perceptions, opinions, and thoughts ([Krueger & Casey, 2000](#)). Reducing group size is an important factor, as it reduces tension and anxiety ([de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009](#)).

The findings of the current study can have useful implications for many education stakeholders. For example, it is beneficial for teachers to know the value of peer interaction and keeping distance from traditional teacher-oriented instruction so that they can truly accept and admire the power of learners while negotiating the topic. Teachers may be informed of how such tasks and activities can be practically employed and what modifications might be required for a strong and flawless process of performing such interactional tasks.

The findings of this study can be useful for learners to become aware of interactional tasks by challenging themselves to initiate such discussions or showing sufficient proficiency to respond and react to various ideas. They can improve their self-confidence, rebuild their initial utterances, have a critical attitude toward an issue, and investigate the problem from different points of view. Applying interactional tasks along with thinking, pairing, and sharing the thoughts and ideas provides an opportunity for learners to practice speaking through task implementation. TPS requires students to use English when doing, planning, and presenting the task. While using interactional tasks, the students can practice the target language in the classroom, which can improve their speaking skills. TPS interactional tasks prioritize meaning-making over form-focused instruction. However, this does not imply that grammatical accuracy is neglected; rather, the structured peer interaction in TPS provides learners with opportunities to receive corrective feedback from their peers and the teacher in a less threatening environment. This balance between meaning and form contributes to the simultaneous development of both fluency and accuracy. Also, the use of real-world tasks motivates learners to speak in the target language. Motivated learners earnestly attempt to improve their speaking skills because there is a positive relationship between their motivation to learn speaking and their speaking ability ([Noviana, 2019](#)).

Syllabus designers and materials developers may also benefit from the insights of this study when designing tasks that address learners' real needs and classroom challenges. In a real-life situation, it is very important to make individuals grow up in a way that they can express their emotions, experiences, and knowledge by sparking their interest and willingness to communicate and removing the obstacles that hinder such efforts. Regarding the research findings, some suggestions are given. English teachers should pay more attention to their learners' needs and interests before designing the speaking materials. It is important for the teachers to use a variety of techniques that are appropriate to the learners' needs and language proficiency because

it can decrease the learners' boredom and anxiety during the teaching and learning process. It is useful for them to use TPS strategies and interactional tasks as appropriate techniques in teaching speaking. Given the findings of the study, the use of authentic or real-world tasks is suggested, as such tasks can enhance learners' motivation and speaking improvement (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

It is quite evident from the research findings that there is a need to incorporate tasks and activities in teachers' training programs and in the development of teaching materials. This study used TPS as a teaching strategy; further research can use TPS as an information assessment instrument. While learners are discussing their ideas, the teacher can circulate, listen to the conversations, and respond accordingly. Moreover, TPS can be employed to assess learners' conceptual understanding, information filtering, and collaborative learning processes.

Although the research outcomes provide useful knowledge about the role of TPS interactional tasks in the speaking accuracy and fluency of EFL learners, there are some limitations present in the paper. The number of the participants in this study was rather small ($N = 42$); thus, it may limit the generalizability of the findings. It means that the selected participants were from one institution and at the same proficiency level (upper-intermediate level) in Iran. The choice of the participants is purely based on convenience; thus, the study may suffer from selection bias. The application of the non-parametric tests appears to be problematic here because the results are contrary to normality requirements, which may diminish the statistical power of the computations. Furthermore, the research focused only on quantitative measures without conducting qualitative research, such as interviews with learners or classroom observations.

Future studies may explore the gaps in this research by conducting studies with a more representative sample size and diversity in proficiency and educational levels. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods may provide further insight into the impact of TPS on the development of speaking skills. Moreover, longitudinal study may study the effects of TPS on the speaking ability development beyond the test period.

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