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A Comparative Study on the Effectiveness of Varieties of Tasks Manipulation on the Fluency and Accuracy of Iranian EFL Learners' Oral Speech

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Abstract

Tasks are as useful devices for identifying learners' needs and thus for designing specific purpose courses. Hence, the present study aimed at examining the viable effects of three varieties of task manipulation, i.e., oral reproduction, role-play, and group discussion, on the accuracy and fluency components of Iranian EFL learners' oral speech. For the sake of homogeneity of the participants, 60 L1 Persian EFL students were selected through Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and divided into three 20-participant comparison groups: Oral Reproduction Group (ORG), Role-play Group (RPG), and Group Discussion Group (GDG). Each of the three comparison groups was treated just through a single task. ORG, RPG, and GDG were treated by oral reproduction, role-play, and group discussion tasks, respectively. The participants were pretested and posttested by the speaking part of Preliminary English Test (PET). The three groups were exposed to ten sessions of treatment, each of which lasted one hour and thirty minutes. The results of the study, obtained through ANOVA and Post Hoc analyses, revealed that the three types of task manipulation had significant influence on the fluency and accuracy of the participants' speech. It was also revealed that GDG, treated through group discussion type of task manipulation, outperformed the other groups in terms of accuracy and fluency achievement. Tasks are hence recommended to be used in EFL teaching and testing contexts in that they are assumed to be effective tools to enhance the accuracy and fluency of English learners' oral speech.

Keywords: accuracy, fluency, group discussion task, oral reproduction task, role-play task

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1. Introduction

With the advent of communication era and the development in mass and social media, we are witnessing a growing trend in numerous instructional contexts towards developing language learners' oral proficiency so that they can successfully interact with the world. According to Seifoori and Goudarzi (2012), what has assisted teachers and learners in achieving this supreme goal is the use of various types of tasks that can serve varying functions. It is assumed that engaging learners in various types of communicative tasks can facilitate their learning and enhance features of their speech.

Conversation has long been considered as the central focus of language and the cornerstone of language acquisition since it has enabled human beings to communicate and thereby satisfy the wide range of their social, economic, psychological and emotional needs. The priority of oral communication was intensified with the advent of the communication era and the technological developments that enabled people to cross geographical borders and connect to the world. The new advancement in technology had consequences for all spheres of science including applied linguistics and more specifically language teaching where the main responsibility of the educators, course developers, syllabus designers and practicing teachers is to define instructional objectives based on the needs of learners (Namaziandost, Hashemifardnia, & Shafiee, 2019). Oradee (2012) proposes that ability to speak is the most essential skill in foreign language teaching and learning contexts in that it is the basic for communication and also the most difficult skill to acquire. Amiryousefi (2016) views that most EFL learners are not often fluent speakers and this deficiency, as he notes, originates from learners' insufficient or mostly lack of exposure to authentic English language environments that allow them to use English for communication and expression.

There is now fairly convincing evidence that performing different task design features and implementation conditions positively affect L2 oral performance (Ahmadian, 2011; Ahmadian and Tavakoli, 2011, Ellis, Skehan, Shintani & Lambert, 2020). According to Liao and Wang (2021), there are a number of learning tasks in the second or foreign language classes which encourage and facilitate interaction among learners in speaking classes and hereby the kind of interactions carried out between them help language learners enhance their linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge. Some tasks have been reported to be effective on speakers' capacity for producing more fluent and accurate language and are said to induce the speakers to manifest more achievement in the fluency and accuracy of oral speech (Kuiken, 2023) and that some tasks have beneficial effects on complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Foster & Wigglesworth, 2016). So it is assumed that the application of the variety of tasks might induce variability in language performance because it contains the linguistic data needed for a learner's L2 system to reorganize itself constantly in order to find equilibrium (Barcroft, 2013; Wong, 2013).

1.1 Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

There is still a dearth of thoroughly communicative-based activities in some EFL classes needed to lead EFL learners to enhance language proficiency and speaking accuracy and fluency, in spite of the fact that their acknowledged significance in oral speech contexts is acknowledged. In some EFL speaking classes, focus on form is a priority and receives more preference. Wang, Rezaei, and Izadpanah (2024) hold the position that incorporating authentic and practical assignments, and engaging learning exercises such as role-playing and discussions help learners develop effective interaction and ultimately lead to improved language proficiency and speaking accuracy among learners.

There is particular emphasis on promoting EFL learners' speaking skills, but there is the problem that traditional methods in teaching speaking prevail EFL contexts where language is formally instructed (Dahmardeh, 2011). Focus-on-forms dominated classes in speaking in some EFL learning contexts result in the deficiency in producing fluent and accurate speech (Dolati & Mikaili, 2011; Noora, 2008). Dolati and Mikaili (2011) and Sotoudehnama and Ramazanzadeh (2011) propose that the deficiency of communicative competence in English in communities where English is studied as a foreign language is the result of the lack of interpersonal interaction in English because in these settings English is not used as a means of communication and as a tool for receiving and sending meaning. Inner-classroom oral dialogues by their interactive nature help teachers to open a channel of communication with individual students and can be used for working on accuracy and fluency. Many English students in EFL contexts wish to gain fluency in speaking, which is the ability to speak the language quickly and effortlessly in communication contexts. To achieve this goal, non-native speakers of English invest significant time and resources. Many of them, however, fail to attain native-like fluency, the main root of which can be accounted by their lack of understanding of lexical chunks in the English language (Mohammadi and Enayati, 2018 as cited in Fathi, 2024).

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Due to a paucity of research on the contribution of three tasks of group discussion, role-play, and oral reproduction to enhancing L2 knowledge of oral speech accuracy and fluency among Iranian EFL learners, the current study aimed at investigating the comparative effects of these three varieties of oral speech tasks on Iranian EFL learners' achievement in oral speech accuracy and fluency. These variables and their potential interaction on each other have not been investigated thoroughly in the Iranian context yet.

The present study, therefore, aimed to examine the impact of three varieties of task manipulation, i.e., oral reproduction, role-play, and group discussion, on the fluency and accuracy of L2 oral speech among undergraduate Iranian EFL learners. To this end, the ORG, RPG, and GDG were considered as three comparison groups of the study. ORG was treated by oral reproduction task, RPG underwent treatment through role-playing task, and GDG was treated by group discussion task.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Speaking Skill

This study originates from the assumption that speaking an L2 is a complex cognitive ability (Jin & Yan, 2024) whose execution seems to involve tradeoff effects among the different goals of speech production, mainly among fluency, accuracy and complexity (Skehan & Foster, 2012; Yang & Kim, 2020). Schutte, Duhon, Solomon, Poncy and Story (2015) focus on four measures of speech performance including fluency, accuracy, complexity, and lexical density. Considering Skehan and Foster's (2012) account and Kakitani's (2023) review on L2 oral performance, fluency focuses on meaning whereas accuracy would involve a focus on form. Likewise, fluency would be possible through the use of a memory-based system, being responsible for lexicalizing language, making it available without much computation during ongoing communication. Accuracy, however, originates from the use of a rule-based system focusing on form which can be achieved through restructuring (hypothesis testing using cutting-edge language) or control (attempting to use more stable forms in the interlanguage system), out of which the former is related to complexity and the latter is concerned with accuracy.

Allaw and McDonough (2019), Qian (2023), and Skehan and Foster (2012) claim that most of the studies on speech (oral) production have concentrated on three different measures: fluency, which is conceptualized as the learners' ability to keep a real-time communication through a focus on meaning; and accuracy assumes learners' orientation towards conservatism and control over more stable elements in the interlanguage system. As Skehan (2012) revealed, owning to individuals' limited-capacity of cognitive system, attention to one aspect of oral performance may mean that there is not enough attentional resources to be devoted to other aspects.

On the components of L2 speech production, Kowal (2016) and Michel (2017) point that mastering a foreign language involves speaking it with fluency and accuracy. Studies on task effects on speech production show that there are trade-off effects between these two competing goals of oral production (Vercellotti, 2017; Zohrevandi, Ahmadi & Khalaji, 2024). These two dimensions of oral production are closely connected to controlled processes and conceptualization of messages or the rule-based system in DeKeyser's (2018) account of L2 production.

Accuracy and fluency are the essential features of speaking skill, but which one should receive priority is a matter of great concern for second and foreign language teachers and learners. Tavakoli and Foster (2009) and Leonard (2015) assert that fluency refers to quantifiable aspects of speech such as speech rate, pauses, repair, and mean length of run. Speech rate is generally calculated as the number of words (Hilton, 2008; Huensch,Tracy-Ventura, Bridges & Cuesta Medina, 2019), semantic units (words and partial words; García-Amaya, 2022), or syllables (Suzuki & Kormos, 2023) spoken per second or per minute. De Jong, Steinel, Florijn, Schoonen, and Hulstijn (2013) and Prefontaine (2010) recognize four conditions for a fluent speaker: the first is participants' or individuals' ability to manipulate to speak with few pauses which he calls "the ability to fill time with talk'; the second aspect of fluency is the ability to speak a language coherently through semantically-dense sentences, with few superfluous words or fillers; the third characteristic is ability to speak and manage language in a wide variety of contexts, not becoming flustered in unfamiliar situations; the fourth and last dimension is individuals' ability to use language creatively. Leonard (2015) offers a classification of various types of fluency, involving the concepts of perceived, utterance, and cognitive fluency.

Allaw and McDonough (2019) refer to accuracy as the correct and acceptable use of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in L2 speakers' language. Housen, Kuiken, and Vedder (2012) consider accuracy as error-free speech.

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According to Gafni, Herzig Sheinfux, Klunover, Bar Siman, Prior, and Wintner (2024), the linguistic component of accuracy is often measured by concentrating on learner's production of a specific form in the contexts mostly pertaining to focused tasks, through which researchers prioritize to measure form and context based on developmental sequence (proficiency) or task conditions. Accounts on studies by Rahimpour (2008), Kuiken and Vedder (2019) and Bulté and Housen (2018) confirm that accuracy is operationally measured by the number of error- free T-units i.e., the percentage of T-units that do not contain errors. Guará-Tavares (2008), Fatemi, Tafazoli, and Ghanbarizadeh (2015), and Yuan and Ellis (2003) measured accuracy in their studies by calculating the number of error-free clauses, taking all errors in syntax, morphology, and lexical choice into account.

2.2 Task Varieties and Oral Speech Performance

A historical overview is sufficient to clearly indicate the significant of tasks in improving various features of oral performance. Since the late 1980 and early 1990s, the term task-based language teaching (TBLT) has played a vital role in teaching English and has continued to draw attention of language teachers and researchers (Ellis, 2009). A variety of tasks that are proposed in TBLT involve conversation. Brown (2007) refers to TBLT as an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching and task is an activity that involves individuals in using language for purpose of achieving a particular goal or outcome in a particular situation. Ellis and Smith (2017) and Willis (2021) introduce TBLT a vibrant area of foreign language learning and second language acquisition research and an approach to language teaching in that language learners obtain opportunities for interacting with others while performing tasks and focusing on the message rather than on the form of the language. Lin (2009) favors it a learner-centered approach and as a communicative tool engaging learners in the natural, practical, and functional use of language for a meaningful purpose. Larsen-Freeman (2012) maintains that TBLT's central focus is on task-completion rather than on a particular function, form, or on the language used in the process.

TBLT has inspired a lot of pedagogical innovations and theoretical investigations among L2 teachers and researchers. Today, language teachers look upon TBLT as a fruitful approach to L2 instruction that has the potentiality to provide them with new insights into the most effective ways L2 can be taught (Fahim, Nourzadeh, & Fathi, 2011). TBLT is essentially a way to create a communicative language teaching (CLT). Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) and Bakhreddinovna (2020) maintain that one of the main objectives of a teacher who appeals to TBLT is to facilitate learning through stimulating and storytelling the students via a variety of tasks which have a velar outcome. Jin and Yan (2024) point to remarkable reputable merits and characteristics of TBLT that are similar to teaching language through storytelling or the Storytelling method.

Ellis (2009) values task as a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. According to Dos Santos (2020) and Nayeen, Islam, Chowdhury, and Zayed (2020), a task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive process. In this inquiry, task variety manipulation as the independent variable is operationalized as embracing a variety of three different tasks, including oral reproduction task, role-play task group, group discussion, each of which was elaborated on in the next sections as follows.

According Hedayati (2019), the oral reproductive task in speaking classes allows learners to benefit the micro-skills referring to producing the smaller chunks of language such as phonemes, morphemes, words, collocations, and phrasal units along with the macro skills implying the speaker's focus on the larger elements such as fluency, discourse, function, style, cohesion, nonverbal communication, and strategic options to communicate their idea to others in different contexts. Julia (2015) and Fikriah (2016) state that reproduction of texts, in particular, stories requires speakers' skill of five fundamental components of pronunciation, the segmental features of vowels, consonants, stress, and intonation patterns, grammar, vocabulary, i.e., mastery over successful second language use of words in context, fluency, and comprehension which involves not only how to produce it well but also understanding when what, and why to produce the language. To be more specific, Hendrawati (2018) notes that some students' failure to communicate orally well contributed to their lack or incomplete knowledge of the determining components of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. From this explanation, oral reproductive type of activity can be implemented in speaking and also in various kinds of contexts in teaching contexts as a creative way

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in the class to have students appropriately accomplish communicative functions according to situations, participants, and goals.

The results of studies by Aye and Phyu (2015), Hien and Phuong (2023), Ikrammuddin (2017), Maurisa (2018), Mujizat (2016), Pratama (2018), Samantaray (2014), and Sepahvand (2014) all have counted on oral reproductive types of activities as useful and effective tools to foster learners' ability to focus on the words, sentences, and the structure of the language simultaneously to produce more meaningful interaction and to improve students' speaking skill. In addition, they noted that students are motivated to finish the task successfully due to productive feature and following some more challenging tasks such as monitoring one's own oral production and use various strategic devices, i.e., pauses, fillers, self-corrections, backtracking to improve the clarity of the message. According to Ellis (2003) and Mackey (2012), this task sometimes encourages interaction that takes place among learners in a class to complete a task or achieve a goal. Asnas (2024, as cited in Suseno, Purwati & Anam, 2024) proposes that retelling or reproducing a text is a good way to teach students how to talk and improves their speaking abilities by helping them gain reasonable confidence in expressing their thoughts to others and recalling their memories in the appropriate manner. This task in speaking classes enhances students' ability to deliver their thoughts smoothly through connecting the related pieces of concepts. This practice allows students to achieve fluency in speaking.

Hambacher, Ginn, and Slater (2018) and Curtis, Dennis, and McNamara (2017) show the significant role of group discussion task which makes demand of teachers' attention to their learners' perception of the activities offered in speaking classes. Sotoudehnama and Hashamdar (2016) point to group dialogue task in EFL contexts as one of the most effective and beneficial ways of practicing oral communications freely involving interaction among the learners ultimately resulting in the promotion of the learners' speaking skill. Learners in EFL speaking classes are often organized quite purposefully in pairs or small groups to practice and have active and creative discussion on various subjects. Al-Issa and Al-Qubtan (2010), and Thao (2019) recognize the significance of discussion types of exercises and place particular emphasis on orally creative activities which continues to be one of the main benefits used to promote EFL Learners' interest in the oral reproduction of language. They value this kind of task as an integrative language skill-building exercise, activating the meaningful oral language and facilitating the complex process of speaking mastery. Likewise, it creates wider chance for the enhancement of learners' cooperation, responsibility, autonomy, and decision making. Karami, Jafarigohar, Tajeddin, and Rouhi (2017) point out to group dialogue task a manifestation of dialogic tasks which encourages the move from merely teacher-oriented to student-centered class where students' communication-driven tendency is purposefully shifted to the precision, recycling of partner's language, reusing the correct language, and editing it.

Role-play task in speaking skill context is assumed as being helpful and useful for teachers to include the technique in their classes, to enrich students' participation and enhance their skills' creation for the construction of knowledge (Martinez,2014).Martinez (2014) and Velasco (2017) counted on role-play technique as a productive activity which incorporates and integrate language skills to enhance a natural use of expressions, behaviors and language through integrating the conventional classroom interaction to external life accomplished by real and meaningful contexts provided.

Jezhny and Bapir (2021) and Piscitelli 2020) showed that role-play as a productive task has positive impact on speaking skills and encourages the interaction among second and foreign language learners. It makes learners use the language successfully in many aspects of their lives. It enables students to engage with the topic in a way that is not possible to fulfill in a traditional method. In addition, the technique has the students participate in a play or represent a specific role or character. It is an important way for the students to practice speaking. Altun (2015), Permatasari (2016), Rayhan (2014), Daif-Allah and Al-Sultan (2023) investigated and revealed the positive effect of role play on improving students' speaking ability and reported that the interlocutors had more opportunities to practice their English within the roles they were assigned. This sort of task can be guided by either in pair or collective practice (Donald, 2010). Idham, Subramaniam,, Khan, and Mugair (2022) highlight the effective use of role-playing in speaking classes by stating that students get involved in roleplaying contexts, find rooms for practicing and learning new vocabulary and sentence structure, and scaffolding learning is initiated and encouraged by dialogue representation which results in improved conversation ability.

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2.3 Empirical Studies on the Issue

Albino (2017), Askari and Langroudi (2014), Foster (2020), Hanzawa (2024), Safari Vesal, Safari Vesal, and Tavakoli (2015), Suzuki and Kormos (2023), Teng (2007), and Witton-Davies (2013), reported positive evidences of the impact of tasks of dialogic nature on enhancing fluency aspect of learners' oral production. The statistical analyses in these studies showed that there were significant differences in the test-takers' performance scores on the variable of fluency as a result of being exposed to the dialogic varieties of task. The results of the studies, based on the longitudinal study, indicated the learners who received dialogue discussion task showed notable improvement in speech rates, the decrease in the number of repetitions in their productions and more comprehensibility of speech than those of the monologue task. Albino (2017) indicated speech fluency enhancement by maximizing the speed of speech production, improving grammatical accuracy, elaborating on their utterances, and developing interactional language.

Rahimpour and Mehrang (2010), Tavakoli and Foster (2009), however, reported contrary and inconsistent results on the effects of task varieties, namely, dialogic and monologic tasks, on speech fluency enhancement. They showed that the learners' oral speech fluency remained unaffected after the treatment as it was in the case of other two constructs of speaking including accuracy and complexity. Tavakoli and Foster (2009) claimed that monologic-based tasks make greater demands on attentional resources than interactive tasks.

Some studies have concentrated on the impact of task varieties on speaking accuracy. Birjandi and Alipour (2010) investigated the comparative impact of individual versus group tasks on Iranian EFL learners' accuracy. The results confirmed that the individual planning group outperformed the group planning group in terms of oral speech accuracy. Seifoori and Goudarzi (2012) investigated the effectiveness of oral production on the grammatical accuracy of EFL learners' oral performance. The findings of the study indicated the positive and facilitative role of oral output in enhancing accuracy of the participants' oral performance.

Shoarnaghavi, Seifoori, and Ghafoori (2014) investigated the effect of one-way versus two-way tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' improvement in oral speech accuracy aspect. Analyzing the learners' oral presentations showed the efficacy of two-way task, presented through group discussion, over one-way task, administered through individual oral speech, in the enhancement of the learners' accuracy of speech. Consistent results were achieved and revealed by Yahay and Kheirzadeh **(**2015) and Kusnadi and Arief Muhsin (2015) in that the group dialogue task resulted in more words per turn, more words per c-unit, and more syntactic complexity.

Thus far, a lot of studies have been done to investigate two components of speaking including fluency and accuracy as dependent variables based on task-based instruction, and their variation have been assessed with respect to independent variables such as acquisitional levels or task features, the most notable of which have been shown by Hilton (2008), Kuiken and Vedder (2019), and Tonkyn (2008). To the knowledge of the researchers, however, few studies have addressed this issue in Iran so far. Worded differently, there exist few Iranian studies to have concentrated on the impact of task varieties, i.e., oral reproduction, role-play, and group discussion tasks, on the features of fluency and accuracy. The three models of task varieties (oral reproduction, role-play, group discussion tasks) are as practical tasks which are frequently used in EFL speaking classes at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. These tasks and their potential interaction on oral speech fluency and accuracy have not been investigated thoroughly in the Iranian context yet. The present study, therefore, aimed to examine the impact of the task varieties on the fluency and accuracy of L2 oral proficiency among undergraduate Iranian EFL learners. To this end, ORG, RPG, and GDG were considered as three comparison groups of the study. The ORG, RPG, and GDG were treated by oral reproduction, role-play group discussion tasks, respectively.

Based on the design and variables as examined in this study, the following research questions were addressed:

Q1: Are there any differences in EFL learners' achievement in oral speech accuracy instructed through oral reproduction, role-play, and group discussion tasks?

Q2: Are there any differences in EFL learners' achievement in oral speech fluency instructed through oral reproduction, role-play, and group discussion tasks?

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3. Methodology

3.1 Design of the Study

All requirements of a quasi-experimental study, including pretest, posttest, randomization, and treatment for the three comparison groups, were met in this study. The independent variables of the study were oral reproduction, role-play, and group discussion tasks, and the dependent variables were oral speech accuracy and fluency. The independent variable of the study embraced three different varieties of oral reproduction, role-play, group discussion tasks, and the dependent variables included fluency and accuracy in L2 oral performance. This study shed light on the effects of the three varieties of tasks on FL learners' achievement in accuracy and fluency of oral speech.

3.2 Participants

60 EFL learners at intermediate level, 48 female and 32 male, majoring in English Language Translation at the Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon branch, were selected. Their age range was from 20 to 27. They were all L1 Persian EFL students. 97 L1 Persian EFL students took Oxford Placement Test (OPT), a standardized English proficiency test, through which sixty students were selected as the target participants to serve the purpose of the study. This homogeneity was achieved by referring to the participants' scores on PET: the scores which stood one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean score were selected as the criterion for determining participants' homogeneity. The participants were selected from intact classes, but put into different groups randomly. They were assigned to three equal groups, each of whom comprised 20 ones.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Reading Section of the Proficiency Test of PET

To keep and ensure the homogeneity of the participants, the proficiency test of Oxford Placement Test (OPT), as a standardized English test, was administered to 97 undergraduate students majoring in English translation.

3.3.2 Pre/posttest of Oral Proficiency (PET)

The participants of this study were pretested and posttested through the speaking part of Preliminary English Test (PET), being composed of four parts of questions administered orally. The oral administration of the speaking test to each of the candidates, according to the instructions of the test, took about 12 minutes. Each participant's oral performance was recorded, transcribed and then measured based on the features of fluency and accuracy. Two raters were involved in the test administration, but each participant interacted with one of them. The raters offered two sets of scores to each participant's performance on the speaking test and inter-rater reliability was calculated and the mean of two sets of scores was considered for further analysis. In this study, the reliability of PET was measured by administering it to 30 intermediate L1 Persian EFL learners who did not participate in any of the groups tested in this experiment. Cronbach alpha formula was used to measure its reliability, through which a high index (0.83) was achieved. The posttest was then administered to the same candidates after a ten-week interval. The pre- and posttests utilized the same speaking test in a rearranged order

In the pretest and posttest, the feature of oral accuracy was measured by referring to the model used by Birjandi and Alipour (2010) and Sangarum (2005), namely, dividing each participant' s total number of errors by the total number of words produced and multiplying the result by 100. So, According to this measure, the higher the number, the less accurate the performance would be. Fluency was measured by using Bygate's (2001) model, which involved counting the number of repetitions, false starts, reformulations, and replacements per t-unit. So for the fluency measurement actually dyfluency was measured. It means that the less the score the better the performance would be.

3.3.3 Teaching Materials

30 samples of conversation passages were selected from Four Corners (Richards & BOhlke, 2018) as an English speaking source of teaching. They were used as teaching material for the three groups of the study and treated within ten sessions, each of which lasted ninety minutes. The participants of each group were supposed to deal with three conversation passages during any single session of oral speech instruction. The conversation sample texts included a variety of different topics.

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3.4 Procedure

All 60 of the participants selected for the three comparison groups were given the same pretest of PET. Then, each group was given a different teaching intervention. 30 conversation passages were used to teach each group, but were taught in different ways. The participants in the GDG were treated by group dialogue task. Each session of oral practice as treatment lasted one hour and thirty minutes. Three samples of conversation passages were treated for each single session. The participants in this group were required to practice conversation orally in groups or interactively with their classmates. They were divided into four five-member groups in order to have group dialogue based upon the subject of each piece of conversation.

To conduct the oral task, the researcher gave instructions to the participants about the steps of doing it such as offering topics of the conversations, explaining what they were going to do, giving them chance for about 5-10 minutes to prepare their view of the topic, asking them to present their oral performance for about 4-8 minutes. Through this form of the speaking task, the participants were given chance to express their performance. They discussed in the group and presented their idea. The researcher gave 4-8 minutes to the participants to present their oral performance in front of the class. To do this, the teacher, as researcher, presented some inferential and referential questions by writing them on the board and asked the groups to have group dialogue practice. The teacher asked the participants to use techniques of definition and synonyms to clarify the meaning of new words and expressions and also brainstorming by presenting words and phrases on the board related to the topic.

The students could take notes and spend time preparing for the task. Finally, the participants in each group were given a chance to prepare a short oral report through which they could tell the classroom partners what happened during their task. Meanwhile, the teacher was ready to give them assistance and answer their probable language questions. RPG was treated through role-playing task, through which the participants were given three dialogue samples and asked to practice role-play through assigning certain roles based upon the content of the dialogues. The situations were examples of real-world conversations. In so doing, the participants were divided into four five-member groups and given pieces of conversation, out of which dialogues were given to the learners to practice each situation with one another. Learners were given texts in the form of dialogues. They were asked to read them together, to get the gist, and to express their ideas about the content of the role they were going to perform. Finally, learners were asked to act out and play the role of each individual according to the conversation.

To conduct role-playing task in the treatment sessions, the teacher's role was very significant. The teacher, as the researcher, helped the learners whenever needed. Each role-play was performed at least twice with learners changing their roles. In group situations the competent learners acted out the role-play to the whole class. The teacher as the researcher acted the role of being a facilitator or an inspector and, whenever needed, provided them with some appropriate and necessary information in order to help them keep on practicing the role-play and assist them to deal with the problems of understanding new words and phrases. As learners kept on practicing the role-play, they sometimes found that they had problems with understanding new words and phrases. In the practice stage, the teacher had the chance to 'feed-in' the appropriate information.

The central aim of this stage was to have the participants complete a task in conversation through the language resources available to them accompanied by teacher's monitoring and supporting role. The participants in ORG received their speaking instruction through the task of oral reproduction or retelling and recreating the texts they were offered. They were offered three samples of conversation, through which they were asked to do oral production activity during each session of treatment. The participants were put into four five-member individuals to complete the task they were supposed to fulfill. This comparison group received English lesson using storytelling technique. This kind of task involved students to benefit their meaning-making, connection-building, and relationships-constructing abilities to construct a coherent text. The time allotted for this group was 90 minutes. Then the students were given time to explain orally their understanding of the main subject of the conversation followed by inferential questions, through which they were supposed to answer orally. The class was finalized by follow-up questions the researcher asked based upon the content of each piece of conversation. Each participant' interview both through the pretest and posttest took 10 to 12 minutes, and interviews were recorded to avoid the probable loss of data.

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3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were entered into the SPSS 16.0 for further analysis. One-way ANOVA was used to analyze the data and investigate the research questions and the alpha level for significance testing was set at .05.

4. Results

The results of ANOVA statistical analyses and post hoc tests were reported separately on the measures for accuracy and fluency for the three comparison groups.

4.1 Results of the Normality Measure

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the Normality Test, as follows.

Table 1 Result of the normality test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Vocab. Equal Variances	Assumed	0.67	0.68	2.73	0.00	1.75
Equal Variances not	assumed			2.73	0.00	1.75

To check the homogeneity of variances, the significance value was checked. Accordingly, since it was greater than 0.05 (F = 0.67, p= 0.68), the assumption was not violated, meaning that that groups were of equal language proficiency at the beginning of the study.

4.2 Investigating the First Research Question

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the manipulation of the three tasks (group discussion, oral reproduction and role-play) and show the probable differences among the three groups' (ORG, RPG, and GDG) performance from pretest to posttest, a one-way ANOVA was conducted on the groups' pretest accuracy scores and another one-way ANOVA was conducted on the groups' posttest accuracy scores.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the pre- and posttest scores of accuracy

Group	Mean (SD)		Lower Bound		Upper Bound	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
GDG(N=20)	3.51 (0.37)	2.01 (0.45)	3.33	1.70	3.71	2.19
ORG (N=20)	3.99 (0.41)	2.46 (0.46)	3.59	2.21	4.17	2.79
RPG (N=20)	3.65 (0.36)	2.86 (0.52)	3.47	2.39	3.81	2.60

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As seen in Table 2, the mean scores of ORG, RPG, and GDG in the posttest are shown to be lower than those of the pretest. Therefore, it has to be mentioned that by considering errors in the calculation of accuracy, according to (Bygate, 2010), the less obtained results, the better the accuracy would be. To find out the significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores, the inferential results are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA test result of pretest scores accuracy

	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5765.79	3	1862.52	0.94	0.50
Within Groups	147275.61	76	1875.07		
Total	153041.40	79			

The results of conducting a one-way ANOVA shows that there is not any significant difference among the groups' pre-test performance on oral speech accuracy ($F = 0.94$, $P = 0.50 > 0.05$).

Table 4. ANOVA Test of Posttest Accuracy

	Sum of Squares	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Between Groups	11.63	3	3.65	12.38	0.00
Within Groups	18.06	76	0.29		
Total	29.69	79			

The one-way ANOVA results indicate that there is a significant difference in the accuracy of the groups' post-test performance as a result of being treated by three varieties of task, $F = 12.38 > 1.00$, $P = 0.00 < 0.05$. Furthermore, a post hoc test was run so as to determine the exact place of differences in the three groups' enhancement in oral speech accuracy. The results of the statistical analysis are given in Table 5.

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Table 5. Post Hoc Test Result on Accuracy for ORG, RPG, and GDG

(I) Tasks	(J) Tasks	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
GDG	ORG	0.52*	0.01	1.00	0.09
	RPG	0.45*	0.04	0.93	0.03
ORG	GDG	0.52*	0.01	0.09	1.00
	RPG	0.07	0.85	0.39	0.51
RPG	GDG	0.45*	0.04	0.03	0.93
	ORG	0.07	0.85	0.51	0.39

As shown in Table above, GDG far outperformed the other two groups, that is, ORG and RPG. However, the level of difference between ORG and RPG is not shown to be significant after the treatment.

4.3 Investigating the Second Research Question

To investigate this question, a one-way ANOVA was conducted on the groups' pretest fluency scores and another one-way ANOVA on the groups' posttest fluency scores, the results of which are shown through the following combined table.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for the pre- and posttest scores of fluency

Group	Mean (SD)		Lower Bound		Upper Bound	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
GDG (N=20)	3.61 (0.49)	2.04 (0.23)	3.42	1.89	3.84	2.16
ORG (N=20)	3.39 (0.52)	2.38 (0.38)	3.28	2.18	3.61	2.59
RPG (N=20)	3.50 (0.51)	2.79 (0.39)	3.22	2.61	3.80	3.17

As demonstrated in Table 6, the fluency mean scores of the three groups during their pre and posttest show significant differences. In order to elaborate on this, the inferential results are represented in Table 7.

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Table 7. ANOVA test of fluency pretest

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.69	3	0.22	0.92	0.54
Within Groups	19.42	76	0.24		
Total	19.93	79			

According to Table 7, it is shown that there are not any significant differences among the groups' performance on fluency in oral speech (F =0.92, P = 0.54 > 0.05).

Table 8. ANOVA test of fluency posttest

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.06	3	3.25	16.40	0.00
Within Groups	12.64	76	0.21		
Total	23.70	79			

The results elicited from running a one-way ANOVA point to significant differences in the oral speech fluency scores among the groups after the treatment provided by task variety manipulation. (F = 16.40 > 1.00, P = 0.00 < 0.05. A Post hoc Test on Fluency was run in order to determine the location of significance in differences among the four groups, the outcome of which is presented through Table 9.

Table 9. Post Hoc test result on fluency

		Mean Difference		95% Confidence Interval	
(I) Tasks	(J) Tasks	(I-J)	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
GDG	ORG	0.39*	0.02	0.75	0.01
	RPG	0.78*	0.00	1.17	0.31
ORG	GDG	0.39*	0.02	0.02	0.69
	RPG	0.41*	0.03	0.74	0.02
RPG	GDG	0.78*	0.00	0.41	1.19
	ORG	0.41*	0.03	0.01	0.78

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The results of Post-hoc comparisons indicate that the level of significance between GDG and ORG, GDG and RPG, as compared in pairs, is lower than 0.05, meaning the groups are significantly different after the manipulation of tasks. Based on the post-hoc statistical analyses of the groups and considering their mean scores obtained, GDG treated by the manipulation of group discussion task outperformed the other groups in terms of enhancing oral speech fluency.

5. Discussion

Focus of this study was to examine the probable variability in the two components of accuracy and fluency of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' oral speech in light of three task varieties, i.e., oral reproduction, role-play, and group discussion. To investigate the impact of the tasks, 60 intermediate students were assigned to three comparison groups including ORG, RPG, and GDG.

According to the findings, fluency measures were statistically significant in the three groups in that there were significant differences in the candidates' achievement in oral fluency treated by various tasks. The ANOVA and post hoc analyses indicated that the varieties of task, i.e., group discussion, role-play, and oral reproduction, had conclusive and positive impact on the learners' speech fluency. In light of these findings, the null hypothesis on oral speech fluency, which claimed group discussion, role-play, and oral reproduction tasks had no effects on and made no significant differences in the learners' fluency aspect, was rejected. It was also revealed that GDG, instructed through the manipulation of group dialogue task, outperformed the other groups in enhancing oral fluency.

According to the accuracy results obtained, the three tasks of group discussion, role-play, and oral reproduction, were effective on the enhancement of candidates' accuracy in oral speech production. There were significant differences in the participants' achievement in accuracy after being instructed by the tasks. Accordingly, the null hypothesis on accuracy was rejected. To elaborate on the significant levels of differences in the scores of GDG, RPG and ORG, Post Hoc test analyses showed there were also significant differences between RPG and ORG as well indicating that the groups were significantly different after being treated by their required tasks.

Observing the fluency findings of the present study, it is revealed that the results are, in a way, consistent with the results of the studies reported by Albino (2017), Askari and Langroudi (2014), Foster (2020), Hanzawa (2024), Safari Vesal, Safari Vesal, and Tavakoli (2015), , Suzuki and Kormos (2023), Teng (2007), and Witton-Davis (2013).

The results of these studies showed conclusive and positive effects of dialogic tasks on oral speech fluency. They reported that exposing learners to task varieties had positive impact on their enhancement of oral speech fluency and made notable change in their achievement in the fluency dimension of speaking. These findings are not, in a way, in line with Kim (2009) and Robinson (2007), Rahimpour and Mehrang (2010) and Tavakoli and Foster (2009) in that they indicated no positive impact of task types on learners' fluency in speech.

The oral speech accuracy findings of this study are , to some extent, accounted by the results reported by Birjandi and Alipour, (2010), Karami, Jafarigohar, Tajeddin, and Rouhi (2017), Kusnadi and Arief Muhsin (2015), Pratama and Awaliyah (2015), Safari Vesal, Safari Vesal, and Tavakoli (2015), Seifoori and Goudarzi (2012), Teng (2007), Witton-Davies (2016), and Zohrevandi, Ahmadi and Khalaji (2024). These studies examined EFL learners' oral speech accuracy through a variety of task-based instruction and reported effective results in learners' achievement in the oral skill component of accuracy. The results of these studies confirmed the treatment effects of dialogic tasks on the promotion of oral accuracy. Rahimpour and Mehrang (2010) and Shoarnaghavi, Seifoori, and Ghafoori (2014) reported and revealed inconsistent results regarding the effectiveness of dialogic and monologue tasks on EFL learners' enhancement in speech accuracy.

It is argued that EFL learners' enhancement in oral fluency and accuracy can be accounted for by referring to Ellis (2003), Hambacher, Ginn, and Slater (2018), Hendrawati (2018), Sotoudehnama and Hashamdar (2016), and Thao (2019), who attach special importance to the role played by communicative tasks to enhance learners' ability of producing fluent and accurate speech. They propose that tasks of communicative nature in speaking skill classes engage learners in some types of information-processing activity which involves and encourages effective language use and fluency in language production. These findings can be explained by referring to Foster (2020), Hanzawa (2024), Villegas and Lukas (2002), who show that the implementation of tasks in oral instruction classes creates opportunities for learners to interact with their partners rather than with their teacher and seek corrective feedback from their classmates rather than the correction made and given by teachers. Learners, likewise, experience correct

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inference, appropriate response from spoken discourse, improve fluency and confidence in speaking in a variety of contexts, and learn to make use of a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary. Highlighting the importance of discussion exercise and its integrative nature and capacity in different language skill, as Karami, Jafarigohar, Tajeddin, and Rouhi (2017) indicated, lead to greater accuracy and fluency in learners' oral production.

Nemat-Tabrizi (2011) pointed out that speaking, whether as a first or second language, requires developing a subtle and detailed knowledge about why, how, and when to communicate and to produce complex skills in order to manage interaction between interlocutors, such as asking a question for the sake of clarity or further information or asking for taking a turn. One of the most important feature of everyday talk is that it is always used in cultural and social contexts. People use a language so as to manipulate various social tasks. Despite the idea that they might not always be consciously aware of carrying various social tasks, they attune the language and the meanings to meet specific purposes for speaking within the communication context in which they are involved. Clearly, if learners are to develop the competence they need to use a foreign language easily and effectively in situations they encounter outside the classroom, they need to experience how language is used as a means for communication inside the class. Task serves as the most obvious tool for urbanizing teaching along these lines.

Accordingly, the findings of this quasi-experimental work, which are in line with some of the studies mentioned above, can be a good justification for placing particular emphasis on teaching two components of speaking skill, namely, accuracy and fluency via task-based instruction in EFL classes. The rationale behind this idea is that task-based language teaching and learning, advanced by Ellis (2003), assumes that instruction must be compatible with the cognitive processes involved in L2 acquisition; second, the importance of learner 'engagement' is stressed in that, as Ellis (2000), Curtis, Dennis, and McNamara (2017) stipulated, tasks are found to be cognitively involving and motivating because from, a cognitive point of view, communicative tasks engage learners in certain types of information-processing which bring about effective language use and language acquisition; third, tasks are as useful units and devices for identifying learners' needs and thus for designing specific purpose courses. Likewise, according to Ellis (2003), the underlying assumption in favor of this framework is that task-based learning directs the learners' focus of attention and creates a balanced development towards the two goals of accuracy and fluency.

6. Conclusion

The main findings of the study revealed that group discussion, role-play, and oral reproduction tasks as the three varieties of task manipulation, through which oral speech accuracy and fluency were instructed, were effective in intermediate EFL learners' enhancement in oral speech. The finding of the study can be useful for EFL learners, English teachers, and syllabus designers. The use of orally-based tasks and implementing them in instructional contexts supplies EFL learners with wider chances to experience practical settings for speaking English and encourage active learner involvement in the oral skill instruction. Exposing learners to various tasks in EFL contexts helps them get more deeply engaged in the process of meaningful learning. The findings of the study are valuable to syllabus designers, through which they gain insight into the appeal for incorporating instructional tasks for speaking classes in EFL contexts through oral communication materials to help learners focus on their communicative needs and gain skills in fluent and accurate speech.

There were some limitations to this study. The reliability of the oral proficiency test of PET, including four sections, was measured and determined only through incorporating a limited number of participants with the same demographic characteristics as the target participants in the study. Incorporating a greater number of subjects to carry out the pilot study is a merit. Second, the study was completed by incorporating a small size of the sampling assignment for each of the three groups (N=20) and this sheds doubt on the validity of the observed significance. A replication study with a greater number of subjects is required in order to have more reliable and generalizable results.

This study was completed by incorporating intermediate learners to examine the effectiveness of three varieties of task on the accuracy and fluency of oral performance. The future studies of similar nature are supposed to incorporate learners with higher level of proficiency. This research work was an attempt to investigate the impact of three varieties of tasks, i.e., group discussion, role-play, and oral reproduction, on the accuracy and fluency of oral speech. That is a good suggestion for the researchers to examine the degree of effectiveness of some other varieties of speaking tasks, in particular, closed versus open tasks on two components of accuracy and fluency in speaking. The future studies of this nature are needed to examine the effectiveness of implementing these tasks in the instruction program over a longer period of time and on certain speaking genres, namely, descriptive, narrative, expository, and so forth. What is

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more, if possible, the future researchers who intend to work on the studies of similar nature incorporate a larger population.

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