

## INTEGRATED LISTENING ACTIVITIES ON EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING FLUENCY

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study attempts to investigate the effect of integrated listening activities on EFL learners' speaking fluency within the framework of task-based activities in the hope of improving their competence. A total number of 30 female students from Safir English Institute in Lahijan, Iran participated in this study as a control and an experimental group. Traditional teaching methods of listening were applied for the control group, whereas in the experimental group integrated listening tasks were applied. A standard sample of IELTS speaking test was administered as the pre-test. At the end of the semester, a post-test was given to the students to determine the influence of the treatment on the experimental group. The data analysis using SPSS (version 19.0) revealed that the subjects in the experimental group performed better on the post-test than the control group. The results of the study confirm the strong effects of integrated technique compared to the traditional approach in teaching language skills to Iranian learners. On the other hand it has an incredible effect which could help the students to be motivated in performing English fluently from high school or even lower levels. Implementing such a method can provide much of the input and data that learners receive in language learning.*

**KEYWORDS:** Integrated Listening Activities, EFL Learners' Speaking Accuracy.

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the most important components in language teaching is having a fluent communication. In order to communicate fluently, it is necessary to hear and understand the speaker. It is clear that learning a second language is a complex process and listening plays a major role on understanding the other and a simple way for all learners to learn a new language. According to (Nunan, 2001) "speaking is an important skill in learning English as a foreign language (EFL), since learners need it for communication". In addition, listening lets the learners hear the way native speakers speak and apply it in their speaking, so then step by step they become a fluent speaker.

Listening is not derived naturally. It needs some process of learning. The main source of listening in EFL learners' classes are the voice of the teacher, but students need more than it. They need a variety in listening. Mei\_ling (2007) examined teaching English listening and speaking through different listening materials. The result lead to motivating students to learn English listening and speaking. Bahrani and Soltani (2011) studied the effects of listening to different aural input on improving different components of speaking proficiency.

According to Mekheimer's (2011) research, it indicated that exposure to supplementary audio materials can be beneficial to whole language development. Blasco et al. (2006) have stated that the use of listening materials in learning and teaching is crucial to provoking the reflective processes and attitudes in the learner.

The primary goal of teaching English is to increase students' proficiency in language skills such as reading, writing, and listening, speaking. Speaking is a great challenge for learners. The difficulty of learning to speak fluently is reflected in the number of sub skills that are corporate in the oral production. Another challenge which faces the EFL students is few opportunities to speak English outside classroom (Littlewood, 1992). Most learners gain the language skills but they can not communicate fluently (Hinkle, 2001).

There has recently been a general dissatisfaction with the traditional approach teaching language in isolation. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in integrated approach in the English classroom that aims to focus on how children learn language. A large amount of studies into language development include language acquisition in young children. A reasonable solution is to present an integrated approach which usually follows the rules of the communicative approach (Fink, 2003; and Canale & Swain, 1980).

Exactly what does integration of listening and speaking activities in the English classroom mean? Obviously, it entails desegregation of the parts of language usually segregated. While the incorporation of these skills into each course comprises a first step toward integration. In the integrated classroom, all activities participate in expanding the purpose at hand.

“Speaking does not of itself constitute communication unless what is said comprehend by another person” (Rivers, 1966). Although listening is often noticed as the least important skill, but it is used for more than any other skill in daily life. Listening is a demanding process, not only because of the complexity of it, but also due to the factors that distinguish listener, speaker, content of the message and any visual contact that develops the message. Some of the challenging factors that listener facing in a conversation are the use of colloquial language and short forms by the speaker or when he/she speaks too fast. This is why it is important to expose learners to different kinds of listening conditions, to help them recognize these speech habits as clues to decoding meaning and finally gain speaking facilities that address fluency in language production.

The researcher expects that the result of this study will provide students with adequate knowledge in mastering speaking as it gives students individual opportunities to practice and improve speaking skills. Furthermore, students have confident to speak and not worried about making mistake and error.

### **Research question?**

The main research question in this study is:

Do integrated listening activities affect EFL learners' speaking accuracy?

## **METHOD**

This study aims at focusing on integrated listening activities which lead to a better result of learners' performance.

### **Participants**

A total number of 30 female students out of 50 students, from Safir English Institute in Lahijan, Iran participated in this research. All of the participants were aged between 15\_20 at the

Intermediate level. They were all native speakers of Farsi. The students were divided into two groups; the one which received the treatment was called experimental group and the other group which received different treatment was named control group, each group consisted of 15 students. First of all both groups took pre-test. A sample of International English Language Teaching System (IELTS) test which consisted of a three-part speaking test was used as a pre-test and post-test. The students were evaluated according to IELTS speaking band description.

### **Instrument**

30 subjects were recruited using two kinds of proficiency tests which consisted of speaking ; as pre-test and post-test. The aim of pre-test was to know about the current level of students' performance and the aim of post-test was to check if the treatment was appropriate and had a positive and effective influence on learners' performance or not.

The students speaking pre-test contains three parts including different topics. At the first part, there are some information questions about family, job, and study. The second part is concerned with describing somebody or something. And finally, the last part includes discussion about a general topic.

As mentioned before 30 students have been chosen to be the members of this study as experimental group and control group. In experimental group, the students had the opportunity to expose to different short audio conversations at least 4 hours a week ( 1 hour in the class and 3 hours at home). Then they were asked to write down whatever they have heard and finally practice with a partner, give their opinions, try to imitate the native speakers' intonation and pronunciation and communicate in a native like way. But in control group, the students only listen to audio materials of the current teaching book for at least 30 \_ 40 minutes a week.

Post-test was administrated after 20 sessions teaching English accompanied by listening activities for experimental group. A sample of IELTS as a post-test was administrated to check if the treatment was suitable and if there was any changes in learners' speaking fluency. Again the test contained three parts as mentioned in pre-test relating to evaluation of the students learning quality during one semester.

### **Material**

Considering 20 sessions for each classes in Safir English Institute, Lahijan, Iran, the teacher was able to play different short audio conversations in classroom which took about 45 minutes each session. During the term, 3 units of Top Notch book intermediate level were taught which their topics were consisted of fashion, shopping, and famous artists. According to these topics, the researcher selected the relevant aural input to play in the class. The selected listening materials had to meet some criteria. The first criterion was the useful input such as vocabulary frequency, phrases and new information and also the variety in the topic.

The second criterion was the learners' interest in the topic. And finally, the selected materials should be appropriate to the learners' culture and religious norms. Therefore the researcher decide to select the listening materials from the book "Impact Values" by Richard R.Day, Junko Yamanaka, and Joseph Shaules and check the relatedness of them before playing in the classroom.

## Procedure

This study was conducted in Safir English Institute of Lahijan, Iran. The first step was to make sure of the students' current level of speaking proficiency. To do so, at first the researcher selected 50 students and then administrated a pre-test among them to measure the learners' speaking proficiency. After administrating the pre-test, 30 students were selected and were put in two groups of 15 students as experimental and control group, then the instruction phase started. One group was required to listen to different aural materials while the other one the audio CDs of the present teaching book which only took about 30 \_ 40 minutes once a week. For experimental group, the treatment lasted 20 sessions, 1 hour a session, once a week and 3 hours listening practice at home. During the treatment, in each session, the researcher devoted times to listening to different aural materials for about 30 minutes, and students taking note of whatever they have heard then asking and answering about them, having students participated in a communicative situation and asking about their ideas, feelings, and opinion. During these phase, four types of techniques including note taking, question and answer, discussion, and description were used to work on.

Most of the students took notes while listening then they were asked some questions in order to discover students' comprehension. In addition, the students discussed with each other and gave their opinion. The control group was only conducted the limited number of audio CDs of related book. After the treatment period, a post-test covered all the materials were administered to two groups. Finally, the results of the tests were compared to each other to know the importance of the listening input.

## RESULTS

### Investigation of the Research Question

The research question of this study aimed to investigate whether integrated listening activities affect EFL learners' speaking fluency. Independent sample *t*-test was used to answer this research question. Table 1 contains the related descriptive statistics. Based on Table 1, the fluency mean and standard deviation of the experimental ( $\bar{x} = 11.26$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) and control ( $\bar{x} = 11.03$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) groups do not considerably differ from each other on pre-test of speaking. In contrast the results in Table 1 shows that the students in the experimental group ( $\bar{x} = 12.80$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) have outperformed those in the control group ( $\bar{x} = 11.56$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) in view of fluency on post-test of speaking.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Two Group's Fluency Scores on the Pre-test and Post-test**

Test	Group	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Pre-test	Experimental	15	11.267	1.361	.228	1.121
	Control	15	11.033	1.060	.211	1.121
Post-test	Experimental	15	12.800	1.292	-.003	1.121
	Control	15	11.567	1.237	-.143	1.121

The results of independent t-test that was used to compare control and experimental groups' fluency scores on the pre-test of speaking are set forth in Table 2. As it can be seen in Table 2, that the assumption of equal of variances is not violated ( $p = .34, p > .05$ ).

**Table 2: Independent Samples Test to Compare Two Groups' Fluency Scores on Speaking Pre-test**

Levene's Test for Variances				T-test for Means			
Factor	F	Sig.	Mean Diff.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Equal variances assumed	.933	.342		.524	28	.605	.2333
Equal variances not assumed				.524	26.417	.605	.2333

Independent *t*-test results (Table 2), showed that there is not any statistically significant differences in fluency scores for experimental ( $\bar{x} = 11.26$ ) and control ( $\bar{x} = 11.03$ ) groups on pre-test of speaking ( $t(28) = .52, p = .60, p > .05$ ), in which the *t*-observed (.52) is lower than the *t*-critical (2.04). Accordingly, we conclude that the students in the two groups have the same speaking fluency level.

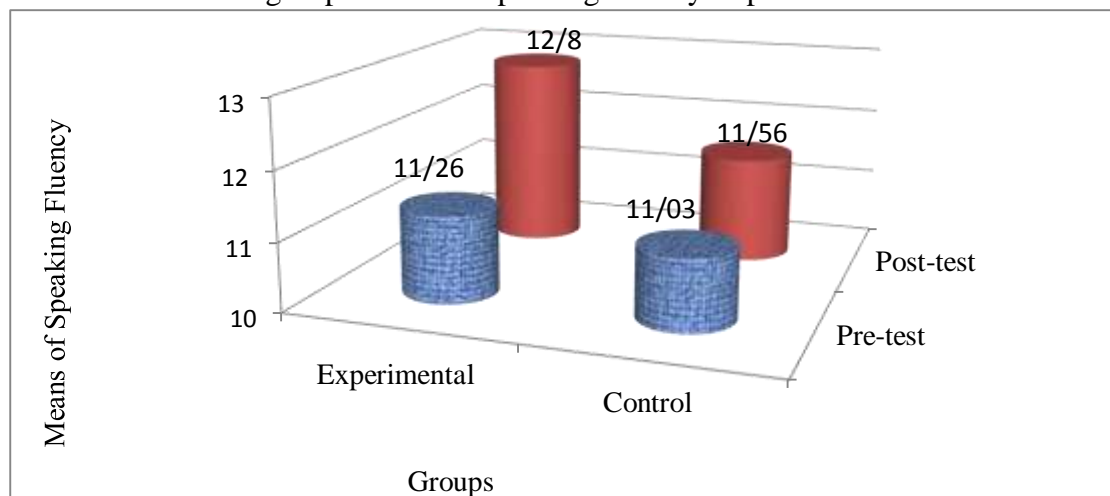
Additionally, Table 3 represents the results of independent *t*-test that was used to compare control and experimental groups' fluency scores on the post-test. Table 3 reflects that the assumption of equal of variances is met ( $p = .84, p > .05$ ).

**Table 3: Independent Samples Test to Compare Two Groups' Fluency Scores on Speaking Post-test**

Levene's Test for Variances				T-test for Means			
Factor	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Mean Diff.	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	
Equal variances assumed							
		.040	.843	2.669	28	.013	1.233
Equal variances not assumed							
			2.669	27.94	.013	1.233	not assumed

Independent *t*-test (Table 3 above) found a statistically significant difference in fluency scores for experimental ( $\bar{x} = 12.80$ ) and control ( $\bar{x} = 11.56$ ) groups on post-test of speaking ( $t(28) = 2.66, p = .01, p < .05$ ), in which the *t*-observed (2.66) is greater than the *t*-critical (2.04). Hence we reject the second null hypothesis and claim that integrated listening activities improve EFL learners' speaking fluency. Actually, the students in the experimental group have surpassed the control group with the mean difference of 1.23.

We present Figure 1 below, which is a bar graph that graphically demonstrates the results. Figure 1 clarifies that the students in the experimental group have shown better improvement than those in the control group in view of speaking fluency improvement.

**Figure 1 Bar graph of two groups' fluency means on speaking pre-test and post-test**



## DISCUSSION

In the past several decades, much evidence has emerged that, in order for learners to attain language competence, teaching needs to integrate linguistic and communicative skills. The overarching goal of integrated instruction is to advance learners' language proficiency required for communication in various contexts. Today, after decades of research in language teaching and learning, it seems clear that, in many cases and for many purposes, the separation of the four macro skills is likely to be less effective than integrated instruction simply because, in reality, communication does not take place in terms of discrete linguistic skills.

The current models of integrated teaching of the four language skills have the objective of developing learners' accuracy, as well as their sociocultural communicative competence requiring adapting the language from context to context and from genre to genre. In light of the fact that at the present time English is widely employed as the medium of international communication, it seems easy to predict that integrated language teaching will continue to dominate among the various types of pedagogical models. Within the framework of this study, it was realized that the students were willing to participate in the tasks as the two skills were presented in integration through different activities, which created real life situations in the classroom.

As a whole the study showed that the listening materials are effective in improving EFL learners' development of speaking skill at the Intermediate level of English. This result can be more approved by this evidence that there were significance differences between the means of pre-tests and post-tests. The means of the post-tests were higher than pre-tests.

One possible explanation of such result is that correct use of listening materials in classroom may help students to enhance their learning and speaking. This explanation is supported by Katchen (2003) who discovered that audio-visual materials can be used as a major course material.

Based on the finding, creating a meaningful environment may encourage students to speak. According to Ardriyati (2010) listening materials can make students become more motivated to learn and communicate in the language. The finding of the study conducted by Istanto (2009) support the use of listening input in class and thus is consistent with the outcome of the current study.

In conclusion, it is seen that the results of the test show that students' success increases when these two skills are taught in integration. Moreover practicing the skills through different activities carry up student involvement and motivation mainly because these kinds of tasks are related to real life and thus leads to communication.

### Suggestions for further research

Further research could involve different audio aids of diversified content such as news broadcast, documentary films, academic lectures, or movies. Investigating the recall success rate after a long time laps would be a good topic for further research. Some of the experts believe that delayed post-tests are meaningful if implemented in a 3\_4 week range, and they are much less likely to be meaningful beyond a four-week delay.

Finally the present study indicates the following as in need for further investigations:

1. Learn more about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom.
2. Examine potential research on the effects of integration on particular skill development such as reading and writing; relate such research findings to error analysis of particular skill errors in EFL learners.
3. Explore the incorporation of literature teaching in an integrated skill instructional methodology for developing language skills.
4. Extend culture teaching to integrated skill introduction in the EFL classroom.

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