

# The Effects of ESA Elements on Speaking Ability of Intermediate EFL Learners: A Task-based Approach

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**Abstract**—In the history of language teaching, speaking has been the main point of interest for many researchers due to the fact that it is the first and foremost important skill by which learners are judged and needs instruction. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the development and implementation of teaching-learning techniques through the utilization of three engage, study and activate (ESA) elements involved in teaching of tasks in improving intermediate EFL learners' speaking skills. In the current study, two intact groups of 15 participants were involved: the control group receiving regular instruction and experimental group receiving instruction through utilization of three ESA elements involved in teaching of tasks. Subjects were chosen from Chabahar Maritime University majoring in translation studies. The subjects were given a TOEFL proficiency test before the study to ensure that both are at the intermediate level of study at the outset. Then, both groups were given an FCE pretest of speaking to ensure both groups equivalence and homogeneity. After that, the control group was taught using audio-lingual method of teaching and the experimental group was taught by the utilization of ESA elements involved in teaching of speaking tasks. Finally, a posttest of speaking was administered to both groups to assess their speaking ability at the end of the study. The data analysis using independent samples t-test revealed that the subjects in the experimental group outperformed on mastering their speaking skills post-test compared with the control group.

**Index Terms**—ESA elements, task-based language teaching, speaking

## I. INTRODUCTION

As a matter of fact, mastering oral ability to most EFL learners is of utmost importance. Most researchers, language experts, curriculum designers, educationalists, teachers and language trainers claim that speaking is the main core feature of the second language learning and teaching. The main reason for this claim is that speaking is used in most daily interactions and transactions. Besides, English is now widely known as the major language of intercommunication, international commerce, diplomacy, advertisement, science and technology and so on.

On the matter of importance of speaking, Ur, P (1991) states that, "of all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred as to 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing and many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak" (p.120). Correspondingly, Lazaraton (2001) puts forth the idea that it goes without saying to state that most people believe that to be able to converse a language is parallel with knowing that language because speech is the most primary means of interpersonal interactions (cited in Silva, 2012). In addition, Graves (2008) asserts that the main objective of learning a language in TL-free contexts are markedly different, but the drive is to learn language to communicate, to promote one's economic outlook, to enlarge one's horizon's both literally and/or figuratively to be a global citizen (As cited in Nazara, s, 2011). To shed more light on the importance of speaking, a short saying by Richards and Renandya (2002) would suffice. They point out that most of the world's language learners study English so as to expatiate proficiency in speaking.

In teaching, one of the salient features of 19th century revolution was the focus on the spoken language and the methods presented including Audio-lingual and Audio-visual were mostly speech based. As Holliday (1985) states "writing is not speech written down, nor is speech writing that is read aloud" (p. 91). Chaney (1998) holds that speaking is the process of constructing and sharing meaning by using verbal and nonverbal symbols in variety of contexts. Therefore, speaking is a way of communicating our thought, feeling and intention orally and student's ability to communicate these, needs to be applied in real communication settings. Harmer's How to teach (Harmer, 2007) also encapsulates the real communicative aspect of language teaching and learning and this approach is entirely relevant to the notion that ample exposure and engagement to the language use would boost learners speaking abilities as well as their motivation.

Since there was a great demand to master speaking ability of EFL learners, a number of methods, approaches, techniques and strategies have been implemented and experimented in order to find an efficient as well as effective way

which could help learners to satisfy their speaking and communicative needs. According to Willis, D and Willis, J (2007) proponents of TBT hold that the most practical method to teach a language is by engaging learners in real language use through designing tasks, discussions, games, activities and so on which require learners to use the language in real life situations. Accordingly, Harmer (2007) notes that unless learners are emotionally engaged with what is going on, their learning will be less effective in which speaking is not an exception rather it plays the most important role. An outlook of former studies denotes the fact that most researches have been carried out to find better ways to motivate and master speaking ability of most learners.

This study is promising owing to the fact that it attempts to fill the gap in the field of language teaching and learning. Hence, this study is significant owing to the fact that it tries to eliminate the inadequacies of former studies and present a new way of teaching speaking by the use of Harmer's ESA (Engagement, Study, and Activate) utilizing a Task-based syllabus.

## II. THEORETICAL AND APPLIED BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As far as speaking is concerned, it is regarded as one of the prime skills to be mastered. With the increasing attention on the acquisition of language skills, especially speaking, it seems indispensable to find and implement techniques and methods which significantly can help teachers and learners to master this skill. Due to this reason, it is the skill that displays the language proficiency and competency of the learners.

As (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997) put forward, speaking is an interactive process of creating semantically meaningful utterances that involves producing and receiving, coding and decoding of information.

Chaney (1988) and Gebhard (1996) define speaking as a process of building and sharing meaning verbally and orally. Elsewhere, Hedge (2000) gives a brief definition and believes that speaking is "a skill by which they [people] are judged while first impressions are being formed" (p. 261). Additionally, Nunan (2003) defines it as consisting of systematic verbal utterances that are produced and convey meaning. Moreover, Bygate (1987) mentions that speaking in a second language (L2) involves the mastery of a specific type of communicative skill.

In sum, speaking is a distinct spoken discourse and its essence is social indeed and people essentially engage in daily interactions mainly for social intentions and in social contexts. (Burnkart, 1998 as cited in Nazara, S, 2011). Bygate (1987) state that speaking is reciprocal, that is, at the same time any interlocutors can make contribution to the discourse and respond afterward to each other's contributions. In the same manner, in oral communication many people can contribute to the same interaction, making it somewhat less predictable than written interaction.

### A. Rationale for Teaching Speaking

Teaching speaking involves utilizing a wide variety of activities, tasks, physical conditions, supportive environment, effort, time, energy on the side of the teacher, motivational factors, and so on to be taken into consideration. Luoma (2004) states that the ability to speak in a foreign language is a burdensome task and speaking competence take too long to promote. The reason that this study puts more emphasis on speaking skill is that it requires learners to enable their productive skills in situations where they need to communicate effectively in L2 situation.

According to Nunan (1991) "speaking is the same as oral interaction which are conventional ways of presenting information, expression one's idea and thought have in one's mind"(p. 40). Hence speaking or oral interaction is not only expressing one's ideas and thoughts, but also a way of presenting new information to others.

In teaching speaking, Brown (2001, Pp. 275-276) proposes seven most significant reasons for designing speaking techniques:

- 1) Use techniques that cover the spectrum of learner needs, from language based focus on accuracy to message-based on interaction, meaning, and fluency.
- 2) Provide intrinsically motivating techniques.
- 3) Encourage the use of authentic language in meaningful contexts.
- 4) Provide appropriate feedback and correction.
- 5) Capitalize on the natural link between speaking and listening.
- 6) Give students opportunities to initiate oral communication.
- 7) Encourage the development of speaking strategies.

In addition, Nunan (2003, p.54-56) proposes at least five axioms for teaching speaking:

1. Be aware of the differences between second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) learning context.
2. Give students practice with both fluency and accuracy.
3. Provide opportunities for students to talk by using group work or pair work, and limiting teacher talk.
4. Plan speaking tasks that involve negotiation for meaning.
5. Design classroom activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional and interactional speaking.

Having this entire in mind, it should be made clear that the most significant rationale for teaching speaking is that it urges teachers to use a wide variety of methods, techniques, tasks and activities.

### B. Elements for Successful Language Learning

Current language teaching practice generally tries to cover most of the language teaching elements and ideas. Nowadays, the language teaching practice generally gives the students the opportunity to think about how a piece of conversation works, while at the same time providing for language use in communicative activities and task-based procedures. To meet these objectives, language experts select some parts of the language best elements from a number of different ideas and methods. Harmer (2007) calls this a principled eclecticism.

Considering the fact that, students need exposure, motivation and opportunities for language use, Harmer (2007) suggests that most teaching sequences need to have specific features or elements. These elements are **engage, study and activate**.

#### *Engage*

Things are much better learned if both our minds and hearts are brought into service. Moreover, it can be said that arousal and affect are essential for successful language learning. With regard to the abovementioned proposition, the main argument would be the fact that if learners are not emotionally engaged with what is happening in the learning process, their learning will be less productive. Here, the main objective for the teacher is to provoke learners' curiosity, attention, and interest and to provide tasks or activities which constantly engage learners. Activities and materials which constantly engage students include: visual aids, simulation activities, game, topic, music, discussions, dramatic stories, etc. (Harmer 2007).

Shulman (2002) stress the essentiality of student engagement and say "learning begins with student engagement" (p.37). Newmann and colleagues (1992) define engagement as "the students psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote" (p. 12). Elsewhere, The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) (2009) defines engagement as "the frequency with which students participate in activities that represent effective educational practices, and conceive of it as a pattern of involvement in a variety of activities and interactions both in and out of the classroom and throughout a students' college career" (Cited in Elizabeth F.Barkley 2010, p. 4). Jillian Kinzie (2008), The NSSE's associate director, states that student engagement has two key constituents. The first one involves the amount of energy and time learners invest in their studies and the tasks that result in new experiences and flourishing outcomes which establishes their success. The second entails the path the language departments and institutions apportion means and provide pedagogical opportunities and utilizations to provoke learners to get engaged in and take advantageous such tasks and activities (Cited in Elizabeth F.Barkley 2010, p.4). This stage can also be called 'presentation' stage. Ur, P (1991) believes that one of the teacher's jobs is to mediate in the learning process so that the learners have access to the materials they have been given. He calls this process 'presentation'. The term presentation is applied to and involves: the modeling of target language when doing the warm up process to engage the learners in tasks or topics of the discussion. In this case, learners can get a sufficient amount exposure to the 'comprehensible input' in the form of spoken language. And presentation can also be applied in giving instructions and explanations of the discussion task. Another contribution or necessity of presentation lies in the fact that it can help teachers to activate and attract learners' attention; intelligence, conscious, metacognitive abilities which will foster the learning process.

#### *Study*

The study phase of ESA describes teaching and representation of any language teaching and learning elements where the main attention centers around on how something is formed. The focus of this stage is mainly on the form of the language and the learners are obliged to do form-focused activities. These may include specific intonation patterns, a specific relative clause or the way a lexical phrase is made or used (Harmer, 2007).

This stage of teaching is also called the language' practice' phase and learners are required to do tasks related to the language practice activities. He refers to practice as" the rehearsal of certain behaviors with the objective of consolidating learning and improving performance" (p.19). He asserts that language learners are required to gain an intuitive, automatized knowledge which will enables them to benefit from fluent comprehension and self-expression. Practicing the language has much in common with the 'learning of a skill'. He also holds that the process of learning a skill entails three-stage process: verbalization, automatization and autonomy.

At the first stage the skills to be learned are verbalized, described or demonstrated. For instance, the teacher may explicate the meaning of a word or the rubrics of a grammatical structure and their contextual use as well.

At the second stage, the teacher gets the learners to demonstrate the target behavior, while monitoring their performance. The errors made by the learners show that the teacher must practice more in the form of more telling or demonstration. This stage involves practicing; performing the skillful behavior consecutively, until it becomes their intake, that is, doing it right without giving it much thought. At this point, they are said to have' automatized' the behavior.

Eventually, they improve on their own by the use of the set of behaviors they have mastered previously. The stage involves learners to do more practice. When learners perform on their own, they are said to be' autonomous'. Ur, P believes that this stage involves reception rather than production and is in fact a more advanced form of 'practice'.

#### *Activate*

This stage gives the description of any stage at which learners are provoked to make use of all or any of the language elements they know. As an example, communicative tasks are prepared to activate the learners' language knowledge.

Harmer Jeremy (2007) holds that the more learners are given opportunities to activate different elements of language they have accumulated in their brains, the more autonomous their use of these elements become. Accordingly, students systematically become autonomous language learners and language users. It means that they can utilize words and phrases systematically and fluently without giving it much thought. Activation is the objective of most classroom teachers. Since it gives information about the learners learning process and the teacher can understand what the students' problems are and can give remedial work where necessary. Ur. P (1991) introduces 'IRF', the Initiation-Response-Feedback as a useful technique in activating or eliciting learner knowledge. He holds that 'IRF' is a convenient and easily administered activation technique which provides the teacher with necessary information about what the learners know. This technique allows teachers to monitor and receive feedback about what has been taught. Another universally used activation technique in teaching is questioning. This technique is mainly used within the Initiation-Response-Feedback pattern.

Another technique used in activating learners' knowledge which is a more valuable tool in oral fluency work is called 'group work'. In this type of activity learners perform a learning task through a group work activity. Ur, Penny (1991) asserts that this type of activity in contrast to other activities like full-class size activity has got numerous merits; he states that learners in class divided into five groups get five times as many opportunities to talk.

The last but not the least of activation techniques used in classroom setting is the role play. According to Richards and Rogers (2001) role play refers to the tasks which involve both teachers and learners to take part in a role required of them to play. It can also include their social as well as interpersonal relationship between the participants of the role play.

As Harmer (2001) puts it, ESA has three basic lesson procedures:

**Straight arrows:** this sequence is much like PPP. At the engage stage of the procedure, the teacher engages or involves the students to participate in the topic discussion by presenting a picture or a situation which assists the teacher to provoke learners' interest or attention. At the next stage, that is, study stage of the procedure, the lexical and structural forms of the language are be explicated fully. Subsequently, the teacher is bound to present by modeling the language and involve the students with repetition drills and rehearsal activities. Eventually, they begin to activate the new language they have acquired by making use of it in sentences of their own.

**Boomerang procedure:** this procedure is more like the task-based or deep-end procedure. Here the order is EAS; first of all, before activating learner's knowledge by asking the students to do something like a written task, a topic, a communicative game or a role play, the teacher gets the students engaged. Then, after they have performed the task, students study some features of language which they have not understood or which they used incorrectly.

**Patchwork lesson sequences** which are distinct from the prior two procedures may follow multiple sequences. To cite as an instance, the students who are considerably engaged in the task or topic are instigated to activate their knowledge before studying one and subsequently another language element, and ulteriorly getting back to more activating tasks, after which, before doing some more study the teacher again engages them and the process continues.

### C. Task-based Language Teaching

For the past two decades, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has gained a profound significance among second language acquisition (SLA) researchers, curriculum developers, teacher trainers, educationalists, and language teachers worldwide (Branden, K, 2006). Although primarily the focus was on form focused task activities, Long (1985), Prabhu (1987) and others supported an approach to language pedagogy in which functional tasks are given prominence, and learners are asked to concentrate on exchange of meaning as well as use of language. In addition to abovementioned statement, other advocates of TBLT (Nunan 1989, Willis 1996, Skehan 1998, Bygate and Ellis 2001) also hold that language proficiency must emphasize the importance of language use and negotiation of meaning to generate outstanding results. Task-based language teaching is the strong version of CLT, which means that tasks are the basis for the language curriculum (Ellis 2003). Accordingly, Willis, D and Willis, J (2007) proponents of TBT hold that the most practical method to teach a language is by involving learners in real life language use through designing tasks, discussions, games, activities and so on which require learners to use the language in real life situations.

Ellis (2003) identifies three different approaches to using tasks in language pedagogy:

1. The initial approach to the design of task-based teaching is humanistic language teaching. Humanistic tenets of education stress the accomplishment of learners' complete potential for advancement by acknowledging the significance of both affective and cognitive dimension in learning.

2. Another approach to task-based teaching is the 'procedural syllabus' advised by Prabhu (1987). He contrived a series of meaning-focused activities comprising of pre-tasks, which the teacher carried out with the whole class, preceded by tasks where the learners performed with comparable activities on their own.

3. The final approach to the design task-based teaching is called the 'process syllabus' proposed by Breen and Candlin (1987). Although the procedural syllabus offers a description of tasks to be implemented in the classroom, the process syllabus is built up through negotiation between the instructor and the learner (P. 31-32).

Although there are a number of definitions of tasks in terms of structural tasks to more classroom tasks, here we will define tasks in terms of interaction, language use, negotiation of meaning, learner output, and learner communication which are essential components for mastering learners' oral capabilities.

Nunan (2004, p.4) defines a task as “a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form”.

Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001) define task as an activity in which it urges learners to use language, with considerably stress on meaning, to obtain an influential goal.

Ellis (2003, Pp. 9-10) identifies six essential characterizes of tasks:

1. A task is a work-plan.
2. Meaning is the primary focal point of the task in hand.
3. It involves real-life use of language.
4. Any of the four language skills can get involved.
5. Intermingles cognitive processes
6. It has a fixed communicative result.

In short, based on the abovementioned premises, it can be argued that the most effective and suitable tasks that worth to be utilized in classroom settings is the ones that put more emphasis on communicative and interactive aspect of language use. Therefore, there must be a shift from form-focused activities to more meaning-focused activities which focus on negotiation of meaning in real world situations.

#### *Task Activity Types*

Regarding the facts that since tasks and activities provide a framework for the genuine and real world learning task in oral interaction, it would be a good idea to look at some activity types that can activate and engage learners in the process of communication and interaction. Following are two different activities proposed by Prabhu (1987) and Pattison (1987). In these activities, they mainly focus on some sorts of tasks and activities which stress real-world and pedagogical use of the language. Prabhu (1987, cited in Kamaravadivelu 2006) uses three main meaning-focused activity types in Bangalore Project. They are:

1. Information-gap-activity: an activity in which learners transfer a piece of information they know to one another- or from one place to another, from one form to another, generally it includes the encoding and decoding of information. For example: a pair-work activity. In this type of activity a member of one of the pairs have total information of an incomplete picture and tries to share orally the part of the information to the other.

2. Reasoning-gap-activity: entails emanation of some new information from the information existent previously by the means of processes like practical reasoning, deduction, inference, or perception of links and patterns (Prabhu, 1987, p. 46 as cited in Kumaravadivelu 2006). For instance, a group of learners working together making decisions on the best way to achieve effective outcomes for a given objective and within given limits.

3. Opinion-gap activity entails discovering and enunciating a personal preference, feeling or attitude in response to a particular theme, topic or task. For instance, like someone participating in a debate or discussion of a controversial social issue.

The second type of activity is proposed by Pattison (1987). He proposes the following activity types:

1. Questions and answers

The basis of these activities is on the tenet that it will create an information gap among learners by allowing them to make a personal and secret choice from among a list of language items. For example, one of the learners asks related question of the location of an object and the other pair answers based on the given shared information.

2. Dialogues and role-plays

Although this type of activities can be executed improvisely, if they are given a clear objective of what they say in their role-plays or dialogues, they may attend these activities more willingly and therefore, it will enable them to learn more meaningfully.

3. Communication strategies

These types of activities are designed to encourage learners to use as many communicative strategies as they can to foster their process of communication. The following are some of the communication strategies: paraphrasing, borrowing, coining new words, using gesture, simplifying, asking for feedback, etc.

4. Pictures and picture stories

In this type of activity, learners are given a picture and are asked to spot the differences, sequence the pictures or tell a story based on the given picture. This type of activity can also stimulate their communicative abilities.

5. Discussions and decisions

Here, learners are required to collect and share information to reach a decision. For example, they may be asked to discuss which recipe of food is good for baking a delicious cake.

Selecting a proper activity types depends largely on the purpose and need of classroom instruction. As an example, a discussion task type is a criterion to engage learners and urge them to participate in class discussion. Or role play can help teachers activate learners' knowledge and receive feedback. This feedback helps teachers to see where the students need more instruction and correction to be used later in study phase of ESA teaching approach.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

### *Research Question*

Considering the discussed theoretical and practical perspectives so far, the present study attempts to answer the following research question:

Q1: Does application of ESA elements on tasks have a significant effect on speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners?

### *Research Hypothesis*

Based on the pedagogical implications of the study the following null hypothesis is to be tested:

H01: Application of ESA elements on tasks has no effect on speaking ability of Iranian EFL learners.

### *A. Method and Design of the Study*

Having a meticulous look at the topic, research question and hypothesis, the nature of the design of the study can be unveiled. Therefore, it can be claimed that the present study is quantitative in nature and aims at showing the effect of applying ESA elements within the framework of task-based teaching on the speaking ability of EFL learners. Since randomization was not possible and the experimental and control groups had already been enrolled to their courses. That is, the two groups participated in the study were intact groups which were administratively defined with regard to the syllabus, level and classroom; this research undertook a quasi-experimental design. To do this, the design of the study will have five stages:

1. Administration of a TOEFL General Proficiency test to ensure the level of the participants.
2. Administration of a pretest of FCE speaking to participants of both control and experimental group to ensure their equivalence before the study as well as comparing the learners' scores with the scores of the posttest.
3. Random selection of two intact classes as one serves for the control group and the other as for the experimental.
4. Treatment of the experimental group via applying ESA elements using a task-based approach and treatment of the control group via a traditional method of teaching.
5. Administration of a posttest FCE speaking to participants of both groups to ensure whether the treatment had significant effect on speaking of Iranian EFL learners after the study.

According to the abovementioned statements, the researcher tried to answer the research question in these two intact groups by taking a TOEFL test of general proficiency prior to the study to establish their homogeneity and to ensure that learners are at the same level of proficiency. However, their homogeneity has already been established. Consequently, after making sure that they were at the same level of proficiency, it was the time to treat both experimental and control group differently. The control group received placebo and the experimental group received the treatment i.e. application of ESA elements on tasks. At last, the data obtained through test results were analyzed using different kinds of statistical tools which are processed through statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software. An independent sample t-test was run to find out whether there is a significant difference between the performance of control and experimental group.

### *B. Participants*

In this study, the subjects were a number of 30 students, both male and female; with the same level of proficiency majoring English translation at Chabahar Maritime University all of which had had the same amount of exposure to English language learning and have passed their dialogue course. All the participants are learning English as L2 language and are native speakers of Persian. Their ages, mainly ranged from 20 to 25. These subjects were assigned into two groups: experimental group having 15 subjects and control group having the same number of subjects. Both groups received the same amount of instruction time i.e. two sessions every week, each session lasted 90 minutes for nearly 12 sessions. This study also gets the help of two assistant professors to assess analytically the speaking performance of EFL learners in pre-posttests of speaking. In order not to influence negatively or positively the results of the study, learners were told that they are having a special course working on speaking.

### *C. Data Collection Instruments*

With regard to the research question, the following instruments were used:

- A proposed ESA task-based lesson plan written and designed based on ESA approach to teach the experimental group students on the required speaking skills. This includes the present study lesson plan program objectives, methods of teaching used in ESA and task approach, activities as well as formative evaluation techniques, mainly portfolio assessment.
- A proposed TOEFL general proficiency test administered to ensure they were all intermediate EFL learners.
- A pre-post ESOL English language FCE speaking proficiency test for measuring overall speaking ability of both control and experimental group before and after the treatment. The tests were taken from Official Examination Papers from University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (2008).
- FCE result course book (2008), Get on Track to FCE (2002) working on part speaking.
- Four Task-based activities which are prerequisites of FCE speaking test. They include: question and answer interview task, picture and picture stories task, dialogues and role play, and discussions and decisions task.
- Recording device for playing back the audio to be used for data collection analysis.

- An evaluation rating scale to score students' oral performance on the pre and post speaking test. This includes two different assessment criteria rubrics. One is taken from Cambridge ESOL evaluation technique for speaking test in which one rater uses, and Hughes (2003) speaking assessment rubric in which the other assessor uses.

#### *Validity and Reliability of Research Instrumentation*

Taking into consideration the fact that validity and reliability are two critical factors in every test, it was tried to ensure that the tests applied in the study were reliable and valid enough. Because the reliability and validity of TOEFL and FCE tests was already established through their lifelong credit, which proves that the reliability and validity of the TOEFL and FCE test is standard, only the adopted FCE test needed to be examined. Reliability of this test was established using a pilot test. That is, the FCE speaking test was applied to a different group of students with the same conditions. The estimated reliability, which was calculated through the application of Cronbach alpha formula, amounted to be  $r=0.71$ . The results revealed that the test was reliable enough to be applied in this study.

In addition to the abovementioned statement about validity of FCE tests, there are also some scholars who support the validity of FCE tests. According to Hymes (1972) and other works of researchers specialized in task-based learning and assessment such as Skehan (2001) and Weir (1990, 2005), the approach taken by Cambridge ESOL university is chiefly rooted in communicative competence models. (Cited in Silva, 2012).

#### *D. Procedure*

The procedure used in response to the research question involves the following steps:

First of all, this study selected two intact groups each of which having 15 candidates from Chabahar Maritime University studying English translation. Then, a TOEFL general proficiency test was administered to ensure their level as intermediate. After that, FCE pretest of speaking skill was administered to both groups before the study to ensure both groups equivalence and homogeneity. Next, the first group received regular instruction. According to regular instruction, participants in the control group were given little communicative opportunities to practice the speaking skills. It consisted of an eclectic method of teaching of two GTM and ALM., with regard to the *FCE result course book (2008)* and *Get on Track to FCE (2002)*, provided for this group consisted of both Persian to English and English to Persian translation followed by a wide range of mechanical drills. Additionally, students receiving regular instruction were not provided with any activities to assist them analyze or self-assess themselves. Conversely, the second group received a task-based approach to teaching English in which ESA elements were used as the point of techniques involved in teaching of tasks. The lesson plan provided for this group consisted of a wide range of tasks and activities which focused mostly on three phases of teaching speaking through elements of Engagement study and activate. The tasks were taken from Pattison (1987). These tasks which reflect the viewpoint of FCE speaking test criteria include: Question and answer interview task, picture and picture stories task, dialogues and role play, and discussions and decisions task.

Finally, a posttest of speaking was administered to both groups to assess their speaking ability at the end of the study and compare the results of the experimental group with the results of the control group.

#### *Instructions for TOEFL (the Paper Based Test) Proficiency Test Administration*

In order to ensure that the participants of the study were at the intermediate level of language proficiency, they were given a TOEFL test of proficiency taken from Phillips, D, 2001. They were asked to do the test in 115 minutes. After determining their level as intermediate EFL learners according to TOEFL (the Paper Based Test) scoring scale, one class was selected as the control and the other as the experimental group.

TABLE 1.  
TOEFL (THE PAPER BASED TEST) SCORING SCALE

Score Scale	Level
380	Elementary Level
450	Intermediate Level
550	Working Proficiency at
630	Advanced Level at

Based on toefl.org

#### *Instruction for FCE Speaking Assessment*

In FCE test, part speaking each candidate's performance is assessed according to his/her individual performance and not in respect to their peers. Examiners assess their performance based on what is expected from a FCE level learner and not what is expected from other levels of Cambridge ESOL speaking tests such as PET, CAE and CPE. The interlocutor awards a mark for global achievement, and the assessor awards mark according to four criteria: Grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation and interactive communication. (First Certificate in English, 2003). In this study, candidates are given a global mark by the interlocutor during the test. Second, simultaneously two assistant professors proficient at teaching give an analytical score based on the ESOL assessment criteria. At last, the researcher records the candidate's voice and gives another analytical score based on Hughes (2003) speaking assessment criteria. According to Hymes communicative competence, all criteria are absolutely essential to effective communication and consequently each criterion weighs the same. Noticeably, in order to obtain a high interrater reliability of test scores of given raters score, a correlation analysis was computed. It also should be kept in mind that

raters were kept unaware of the expected outcomes of the study and were randomly assigned. According to the table2, it can be construed that the computed correlation is strong evidence that there is a relative positive correlation between the scores assigned by the raters. Hence, the scores obtained by the raters are to be consistent.

TABLE2.  
RATERS SCORE CORRELATION ANALYSIS

		VAR00001	VAR00002	VAR00003
VAR00001	Pearson Correlation	1	.723**	.845**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002	.000
	N	15	15	15
VAR00002	Pearson Correlation	.723**	1	.709**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002		.003
	N	15	15	15
VAR00003	Pearson Correlation	.845**	.709**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	
	N	15	15	15

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Statistical procedures used to analyze all the data in this study included mean scores, and Independent sample t-test. They were used to process the data gained from each of the research instruments. The SPSS software was used for statistical analysis of the data collected from all of the research steps.

##### A. Data Analysis Prior to the Experiment

For the purpose of this study, 30 intermediate EFL learners were selected, 15 as the treatment group and 15 as the control group, in an intact group design. To gauge the participants' language proficiency and homogeneity, TOEFL general proficiency test and FCE speaking pretest was run. Moreover, to make certain the comparability of the groups level as the intermediate EFL learners, it suffice to state that they are all students of English translation and have passed the dialogue course.

##### *Performance of the Participants on the TOEFL General Proficiency Test*

In order to ensure that all the participants were intermediate EFL learners, they were administered TOEFL general proficiency test. The estimated language proficiency mean of all participants amounted to 428.67. Therefore, according to the TOEFL paper-based scoring scale, it can be ensured that all the participants are intermediate EFL learners.

TABLE3.  
RESULTS FOR THE TOEFL GENERAL PROFICIENCY TEST

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
VAR00001	30	340.00	520.00	4.2867E2	57.15878
Valid N (listwise)	30				

##### *Performance of the Participants on the FCE Speaking Pretest*

In order to ensure the comparability of both groups, the control and experimental group's performance were compared. All the participants were administered an FCE speaking test to ensure they were all homogenous.

As table 3 indicates, the language proficiency mean and the standard deviation for the control group amounted to 13.20 and 1.69, respectively, and the evaluated mean and standard deviation for the treatment group amounted to 13.13 and 1.72, respectively. An independent sample t-test was run to determine any significant difference between the mean scores (tale 4).

TABLE4.  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE RESULTS OF FCE SPEAKING PRE-TEST

Group Statistics					
	Grouping	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
VAR00001	Control	15	13.2000	1.69874	.43861
	Experimental	15	13.1333	1.72654	.44579



TABLE5.  
INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR THE FCE PRE-TEST OF THE TREATMENT AND CONTROL GROUPS

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
VAR00001	Equal variances assumed	.175	.679	.107	28	.916	.06667	.62539	-1.21438	1.34772
	Equal variances not assumed			.107	27.99	.916	.06667	.62539	-1.21440	1.34773

As it is shown in table 4.2, the P value is more than 0.05 which indicates that both groups are homogenous and there are no statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups on the pretest in overall speaking performance. As a result, it can be consummated that the two groups were relatively at the same level of proficiency in speaking. On that account, any incongruity between the two groups that may arise after the application of the program will be attributed to it.

### B. Posttest Findings

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of application of ESA elements on tasks on boosting speaking ability of EFL learners. It was hypothesized that this type of instruction has no significant effect on intermediate Iranian EFL learners' speaking skills improvement.

#### *Performance of the Participants on the FCE Post tests*

Table 6 and 7 display the results of the post-test for the treatment and control groups. The computed speaking performance development mean and standard deviation of the participants in the control group equaled 13.80, and 1.52, respectively. And the computed speaking performance development mean and standard deviation of the participants in the treatment group equaled 16.60, and 1.54, respectively. An inspection of the mean scores showed that there was a considerable difference between the treatment group and the control group in terms of overall speaking performance. Moreover, the independent-samples *t*-test analysis showed that this difference was statistically significant ( $p=0.000$ ). Hence wise, it can be surely said that there were statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups on the post- test in overall speaking in favor of the experimental group. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that, applying ESA elements on tasks has no significant effect on improving speaking performance of intermediate EFL learners is rejected.

TABLE6.  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE RESULTS OF FCE SPEAKING POSTTEST

Group Statistics					
Grouping	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
VAR00001	Control	15	13.8000	1.52128	.39279
	Experimental	15	16.6000	1.54919	.40000

TABLE7.  
INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T-TEST RESULTS FOR THE FCE POSTTEST OF BOTH GROUPS

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
VAR00001	Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	-4.995	28	.000	-2.80000	.56061	-3.94836	-1.65164
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.995	27.99	.000	-2.80000	.56061	-3.94838	-1.65162

As a result, it can be concluded that the results approved the significant impact of applying ESA elements on tasks in mastering speaking performance of learners. Therefore, the findings confirm that the experimental group has outperformed the control group.

## V. CONCLUSION

The present study was an attempt to investigate the probable impact of applying Harmer's ESA elements on tasks in improving speaking ability of intermediate EFL learners. Although numerous studies in relation to tasks have been carried out, it seems a few of the studies have noticed the importance of student engagement in presenting tasks through ESA elements. Based on the theoretical and applied background of the study, it is made clear that this study confirms the positive role of the Harmer's ESA elements applied on tasks in mastering speaking performance of the learners. Likewise, the results of the study show that this technique is quite influential in the development of speaking proficiency of EFL learners.

The findings of this study recommend some courses of action for EFL teachers, material producers and methodologists that enable them to choose the best method of dealing with the reality of EFL speakers' problems. The study encourages EFL teachers to address speaking ability via employing ESA elements involved in teaching of speaking through tasks.

One of the most salient privileges of this approach seems to be that participants in the experimental group exhibited a higher tendency in task engagement and had more opportunity to express their ideas and feelings more freely compared to participants of the control group who preferred to use memorized bits of fixed phrases.

Further studies; however, is needed to ascertain whether this type of technique is utilitarian in teaching other kinds of skills such as reading, writing and listening as well as teaching grammar and vocabulary knowledge.

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