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Revisiting the Contribution of Input and Output in the Improvement of Speaking Fluency of Iranian EFL Speakers

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ABSTRACT

The present qualitative research, using an open interview, intended to identify the proportion of contribution of input and output and each of four language skills in improvement of English language speaking fluency of the most fluent EFL speakers who have picked up fluency in their own country. To accomplish this, 17 participants (7 females and 10 males) including 11 EFL learners in B.A. and M.A. degree and 6 EFL teachers (holding B.A. and M.A. degree) in English language institutes in Shiraz, Iran were purposefully selected. The number of participants, with age range of 19 to 55, depended on data saturation. The criterion for selecting the fluent speakers, besides the instructors and colleagues' knowledge of the participants' speaking fluency, was the Speaking Rubric scale chosen from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001). The results revealed that both input and output had impact on their fluency. However, the role of input was by far more pivotal. Moreover, although all language skills collaborated in the development of speaking fluency, the role of listening was by a great deal more appealing. Huge amounts of listening helped learners speak effortlessly. From the participants' viewpoints, it can be concluded that for enhancing speaking fluency, listening skill should become an inseparable part of the learners' daily schedule. The findings may make all the stakeholders aware to put more emphasis on listening as an input receptive skill which may have the greatest impact on improving speaking fluency.

Keywords: *Input, Output, Speaking, Fluency, Language Skills*

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1. Introduction

The world is an increasingly globalized place where people need to communicate and connect with one another. In this respect, English has become an international language or lingua franca over the years and nonnative speakers have become motivated to learn it. Brown and Lee (2015) claim that "English is increasingly being used as a tool for interaction among non-native speakers" (p. 163). Hence, people tend to attend English language classes to learn different English language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Among all these skills, speaking seems to be the most important one. Bailey and Savage (1994) mention that among the four language skills, speaking a second or foreign language has been considered as

the most demanding skill. In addition to Ur (2012) who believes that speaking is the most important skill, Zaremba (2006) holds that among the four language skills, speaking seems to be crucial for communication. Saunders and O'Brien (2006) say that oral English is necessary to achieve academic, professional as well as personal goals. Since the purpose of using language is interaction and communication, the role of fluency in speaking is highlighted. In other words, it is important for learners to improve not only their speaking accuracy, but also their speaking fluency to achieve communicative purposes in conversations.

Different definitions of fluency are provided. Fillmore (1979, as cited in Nation, 1989, p. 377) states that fluency is "the ability to fill time with talk... a person

who is fluent in this way does not have to stop many times to think of what to say next or how to phrase it.” According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), fluency refers to “the production of language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation” (p. 139). They also add that it occurs when learners concentrate more on meaning than form. In addition, Schmidt (1992) believes that fluency is “the processing of language in real time, rather than with language as the object of knowledge” (p. 358). To Brumfit (1984), it means natural use of language similar to that of the native speakers.

Theorists hold differing views on the factors affecting speaking. Among them, Krashen (1982, 1985) and Swain’s (1985, 1995) theories play special roles in the development of speaking fluency. Krashen and Terrell (1983) and Leow (2007) emphasize the crucial role of input in language learning. For Krashen, what matters is mere exposure to language. Krashen (1985, p.2) points out that “humans acquire language in only one way -by understanding messages, or by receiving input”. He also maintains that “if input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided.” Krashen (1982) emphasizes the adequate amount of input. According to him, sufficient input makes speech emerge naturally. Moreover, Krashen (1989, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2014) suggests that the only effective approach to learn lexical chunks or memorized patterns is to receive large amounts of language input. Furthermore, according to Lewis (1997, p.15), “fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated items, which are available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity.”

To Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 157), “input refers to language sources that are used to initiate the language learning process” and to Harmer (2015) it is related to what we hear and see. He also states that English language can be acquired, noticed or learned more when more input is obtained by seeing and listening. In the same vein, Nation and Newton (2009) mention that learning through input refers to learning by listening and reading and Nunan (1999, p.309) states that input is “the target language that is made available to learners.”

On the contrary, Swain (1985) devalues the essential role of input for language

acquisition and emphasizes the role of output. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), “output refers to the corpus of utterances that learners actually produce orally or in writing” (p. 48). Or as Nation and Newton (2009) note, output refers to speaking and writing. In Swain’s (1985) opinion, input alone is not enough. She introduces the concept of “Pushed Output” and believes that learners should be pushed to produce language; therefore, they have the chance to deliver the messages which are precise, coherent, and appropriate. Considering what she says, it can be concluded that speaking can be developed by speaking. Swain (1985) also advances to say that output can push learners to notice the gap between their interlanguage and the target language. To Swain (1995), output has three possible functions: noticing/triggering function, hypothesis-testing function, and metalinguistic function. The noticing/triggering function refers to the possibility that learners may encounter a linguistic problem when they use the target language to communicate. Consequently, their awareness of what they know or what they do not know only partially may be raised and an appropriate action may be performed to solve the problem. The hypothesis-testing function relates to the possibility that learners may test what linguistic system works or does not work when they receive feedback from an interlocutor during their interactions. Finally, the metalinguistic function refers to the possibility that using the target language may make learners consciously think about language forms, rules, and form-function relationships to produce correct and communicatively appropriate utterances. Moreover, de Bot (1996) argues that output plays an essential role in second language acquisition. He also points out that output “plays a direct role in enhancing fluency by turning declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge” (p. 529). The role of output has been supported by other researchers as well (e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; and Whitlow, 2001).

The majority of studies performed on the role of input and output in language acquisition are theoretical. However, no qualitative research has been done to gain an in-depth understanding in this respect. Given this and concerning the key role speaking fluency plays in communication, the present study, for the first time, aimed at investigating the extent these two factors



contribute to the development of speaking fluency.

With this background, the objective of this study was to determine which one, input or output along with their related perceptive and productive skills plays a bigger part in the development of English language speaking fluency. Hence, the research questions were:

- What is the role of input and output in improving speaking fluency in English as a foreign language?
- What language skill contributes more to improvement of English-speaking fluency?

2. Literature Review

Given the role speaking fulfills in communicative efficiency, two distinguished scholars, i.e. Krashen (1982) and Swain (1985), as it was mentioned earlier, have proposed two opposing views in promoting this language skill. Inspired by them, different researchers have carried out a number of studies on the factors related to input and output-based instruction to support which view is more influential in the enhancement of output, in general, and speaking skill, in particular. Among these researchers, Zhang (2009) carried out a piece of research in which fifty-two students of Computer Science studying English participated in an experimental design. The students in the experimental group practiced English learning for one year by listening to materials. However, the control group practiced English based on the traditional method and without the help of listening. The findings of the study showed that there was a relationship between the learners' listening and speaking ability. In other words, the students' speaking ability was improved by using more listening and audio-visual materials. In addition, inserting more listening and audio-visual materials could not only improve the learners' listening, but also it could help them get closer to native-like authentic English.

A group of learners of Russian language took part in a piece of research undertaken by Stroh (2012) on the effect of repeated reading aloud on Russian spoken fluency. The participants were randomly divided into two groups, control and experimental. In contrast to the participants in the CG who had to read the given passages silently, those in the EG were asked to read them loudly. The passages were articles from a Russian news journal with varied

content. Since they were not simplified, they were heavily glossed to make sure that the participants could understand them. Longer articles were shortened. They were displayed by a modified version of the *Extending Your Russian* software package containing passages and additional exercises for reading aloud. Some words were highlighted in the articles and by selecting them, the participants could hear their pronunciation and learn their definitions and stress patterns. The EG had to read each article and comprehend it. After feeling comfortable with the meaning of the article, they could move to the second reading stage. They were given the time it would take a native speaker to read that passage. They had to read it loudly at least three times or until their reading time was about 10% slower than the standard. This reading aloud section was omitted for the CG. The experiment lasted for at least three weeks. There was no pretest; however, after each week, the participants were given a posttest consisting of speaking prompts and three passages reading aloud. The topics of the posttests were familiar to them and they had to record their voices. According to the results of the study, repeated reading aloud had an impact on the fluency of the participants.

Sadeghi Beniss and Edalati Bazzaz (2014) carried out a study to examine the impact of pushed output on Iranian EFL learners' speaking accuracy and fluency. Thirty upper-intermediate female English learners attended the study. They were randomly divided into two groups of control and experimental with 15 participants in each group. Participants in both groups were interviewed and their voices were recorded. Then in contrast to the CG participants who received non-pushed output activities, those in EG were pushed to produce the target language through picture description, retelling, ask and answer task and storytelling for twelve sessions. After the twelfth session, the learners in both groups were interviewed again as the posttest stage. The findings of the research based on the comparison of the pre- and post-interviews in CG and EG revealed that pushed output had a significant impact on accuracy. However, it did not provide a sufficient condition for fluency development.

Ghenaati and Madani (2015) studied the effect of exposure to TV and radio news on the Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency. Senior EFL learners at university were selected and given four pieces of news to read at the pretest stage. A part of the news was chosen and the learners had to retell that part in their own words and their speaking ability was measured. Then the learners were given enough exposure to TV and radio news for a few weeks. They were also allowed to take notes of whatever they heard regarding the news for further discussion outside the classroom environment. After having enough exposure to TV and radio news, four new related pieces of news were given to the learners to read and then they were asked to retell the one which was randomly selected by the researchers. The outcomes of the study indicated that the exposure to TV and radio news improved the learners' speaking fluency.

A study was conducted by Nemat Tabrizi and Koranian (2016) to examine the effect of input-based instruction on speaking ability. To do so, holding an IELTS interview, 50 Iranian females were selected and randomly divided into a CG and an EG. In spite of the CG which was based on only output instruction (both written and oral), the EG received input-based instruction (both written and audio) for an hour during 25 sessions. The results of the study indicated that the students in the EG group had a better performance in the speaking test due to the input they had received.

Ho (2016) carried out a study to investigate the effects of listening comprehension on ESL learners' English language proficiency. To achieve this goal, purposive sampling was used to select 26 participants. For the pre-test, a set of IELTS language proficiency sample test was used. During the four weeks, listening passages were played for the students. Each listening lesson started with a pre-listening activity, played four times, and followed by post-listening activities. During the study, the researcher observed the students' performance chronologically and took notes. Another set of IELTS language proficiency sample test was used for post-test. The outcome of the study showed that listening comprehension skill had considerable effects on the students' reading, writing, and listening skills. It also facilitated the improvement in their speaking skill.

In a study done by Gholami and Farvardin (2017), the impacts of input-based and output-based instructions on learners' productive knowledge of collocations were examined. Eighty Iranian students with low-intermediate proficiency level, based on their scores on the Oxford Placement Test, were chosen. They were assigned to three groups: a CG and two EGs. The CG received traditional instruction including translating L2 collocations into L1. On the other hand, one EG received input-based instruction while the other one was given output-based instruction. Twenty collocations were taught, five collocations each week during a 20-minute session. An immediate posttest was administered to the participants two days after the last session of the treatment. Moreover, two weeks later, a delayed posttest was given to them. The results revealed that both EGs outperformed the CG. Conversely, no significant differences were found between the EGs. In other words, both input-based and output-based instructions could help the groups extend their productive collocational knowledge.

On the impact of oral pushed output on the learning and retention of English perfect tenses, Jafarpour Mamaghani and Birjandi (2017) performed a piece of research in which a pre-test was administered to 22 freshmen in the field of English translation. After the participants were randomly assigned to two groups both groups received explicit instructions for six sessions on English perfect tenses. In every session, while the participants in CG were required to answer conventional multiple choice tests on the instructed materials, those in EG were asked to record their oral performances on picture description and translation tasks for which they had to use the instructed language forms. After treatment, a post-test was run and then four weeks later, a delayed post-test was administered as well. Analysis of ANOVA, supported the oral pushed output influence on the learning and retention of English perfect tenses. At the end, some implications were provided for materials developers and EFL teachers.

Analyzing the above-mentioned studies, one can conclude that although both input and output have been effective in improving output (speaking skill), the role of input and input-based instruction



(e.g., listening, repeated reading, and exposure to TV and radio) have been more prominent. However, the role of pushed output in three studies above cannot be overlooked. While the studies on the topic under investigation are experimental, no qualitative research is carried out via interview to identify in depth whether input or output, together with their related language skills, have served a more leading role in promoting speaking language fluency of the most fluent speakers of English as a foreign language. Hence, the present study is going to take a step to bridge this gap.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Using purposive sampling, the current qualitative research focused on the participants who were fluent speakers of English. They were selected based on two criteria: a) their English language speaking fluency and b) not having had life experience abroad but being successful in improving their speaking fluency in their own country. The participants were both EFL learners studying in an English language department and English language teachers teaching in English language institutes in Shiraz, Iran. To select the eligible participants, the researchers asked the English language instructors in the English language department and English language institutes to introduce those who were known as fluent English speakers. In doing so, in addition to their knowledge of the participants with whom they had class and had worked, the instructors based their judgment on a speaking scale to introduce the most appropriate fluent speakers with specific levels intended. The number of participants were 17 (7 females and 10 males) including 11 EFL learners in B.A. and M.A. degree and 6 EFL teachers (holding B.A. and M.A. degree) in English language institutes. The number of participants depended on data saturation. Their age range was 19 to 55.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1 Analytic Scale

The criterion for selecting the fluent speakers, besides the instructors and colleagues' knowledge of the participants' speaking fluency, was the Speaking Rubric scale chosen from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): Learning, Teaching, Assessment which is published by Council of Europe (2001). It contains factors relating to range,

accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence. The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at three main levels referring to basic users of a language, independent users, and proficient users. Each category is divided into two subcategories, including A1 and A2, B1 and B2, and C1 and C2, respectively. In other words, A1 refers to those with the lowest spoken skills and C2 to those with the highest spoken skills. Each subcategory describes what a person is supposed to be able to do in detail. It also defines three 'plus' levels: A2+ (between A2 and B1), B1+ (between B1 and B2), and B2+ (between B2 and C1). The participants were chosen based on levels C1 and C2. Given the objective of the study and CEFR comparison with other speaking scales such as Foreign Service Institute (FSI), Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), TOEFL, and IELTS, the intended scale was selected. The priority of this scale over the rest is that it embraces more speaking components with different levels and provides full-detailed analytic descriptors on each component. Some subcategories included in CEFR, according to Brown and Lee (2015), are very detailed (See the scale in Appendix 1).

3.2.2 Interview

The second instrument was an interview with two questions reflected in the research question. The questions were formulated based on the objective of the study. The forthcoming questions were raised based on the answers provided by the interviewees.

3.3. Data collection and data analysis procedure

Before the embarkation of the main research, a pilot study was conducted with three participants, except those 17, in several sessions. It helped the researchers to realize how the real data collection procedure could be carried out to reach the optimum result. Though the participants were fluent English speakers, the interviews were done in Persian because the purpose was not to evaluate their English-speaking fluency, but to elicit information about the strategies that had made them fluent English speakers. Using their mother tongue, they would feel more comfortable and secure to express their ideas and feelings, and would be more interested in sharing information. In addition, conducting the interviews in Persian could eliminate the probable

misunderstandings.

After the pilot study, the main interviews were held individually and face-to-face. The interviewees were ensured that their anonymity would be preserved. Each interview took about two hours. The length of time varied depending on the participants' cooperation and the information they provided. As it was mentioned earlier, first a general question was raised, as the nature of an open interview necessitates, and then based on the interviewees' responses the following questions were generated. To elicit relevant, to the point, and deeper information, key words were noted, and targeted to be asked in later questions (See a sample of the questions in Appendix 2). It should be noted that both in the pilot and main study, each participant was given a break to be served during the interview session. The participants' voice was audio-recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed. The main ideas were culled, categorized, and then translated into English. By sending electronic messages, the researchers shared their interpretations of the data with some participants to reach the correct and authentic data, and to increase the study's credibility and conformability. Then the researchers asked a translator to randomly read some of the translated sentences and do back-translation to enhance their accuracy. It should be added that the credibility (truth value) of data was obtained through consensus, using peer review/peer debriefing. Discussion between the two researchers determined whether they considered their interpretations to be reasonable. To clear up miscommunication, identify inaccuracies, help the researchers obtain extra useful data, and increase the study's credibility and conformability, member check/participant feedback was used as well. The dependability (consistency) of the data was obtained by coding agreement. The inter-coder reliability was found to be 0.95. The remaining differences were resolved through discussion. Finally, the results of the study were descriptively reported.

4. Results and Discussion

Concerning the first research question, the analyzed data showed that compared with output, input played by far a more prominent role in the development of the participants' speaking fluency. Most of the participants indicated that although they did not have enough speaking

opportunities, they were able to speak fluently after receiving large amounts of input. Participant 7 in this respect said:

I, after a long time of having no opportunity to talk English, decided to do that, but couldn't because I didn't remember words, expressions, etc. Then I started listening to films and news programs continually for a while and they helped me improve my speaking skill and activate my speech motor effortlessly.

Participant 6 in this regard stated:

You can't speak when you have nothing in mind. ... After several months of being exposed to input by watching movies, my teachers got surprised by my progress in speaking English fluency.

The participants also mentioned that input alone could increase their fluency even when they did not have enough practice on their output. They added that they received enough input before they started speaking English. Most of them reflected that having achieved a great deal of input enabled them to speak with no effort which implies that the amount of input really matters. According to them, when they achieved massive amounts of input, their minds became so saturated with English signals that they felt the input was flowing out of their minds, and consequently, they could naturally and automatically speak without difficulty. In this respect, participant 1 indicated that "massive amounts of speaking, is the result of being saturated by massive amounts of listening." And participant 13 in the same line stated:

When I'm exposed to huge amounts of input, I can't stop speaking English. Speaking English automatically tends to manifest itself and then I'd like to express everything in English.

The above data support Krashen's (1982) notion who believes that input is essential for language learning and language learners should talk when they are ready to talk. Similarly, participant 5 accentuated that "learners should obtain enough listening until they feel they are ready to talk". In step with the aforementioned quotes, Krashen (1985, p. 2) holds that "speech cannot be taught directly but 'emerges' on its own as a result of building competence via input." The above points are also in accord with Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach in which comprehension precedes production and "speech (and

writing) production emerges as the acquisition process progresses” (p. 58).

However, although input served an important role in the participants’ speaking fluency, it was accurate input which was notably of concern. As it was exhibited by participant 15, “being exposed to listening is necessary, but what matters is being exposed to correct form of listening.” Participant 12 particularly revealed the importance of accuracy of input for the beginners and said: “accurate listening is essential especially for beginners because it helps them avoid error fossilization.” And participant 13 underlined the linguistic inaccuracies (lexical, grammatical, etc.) in social networks and put on view that “although English social networks are useful for improving speaking fluency, one must be cautious and aware of language inaccuracies.” From the above-mentioned points, it can be inferred that input can be fruitful if it is a) constant b) longitudinal c) accurate, and d) immense.

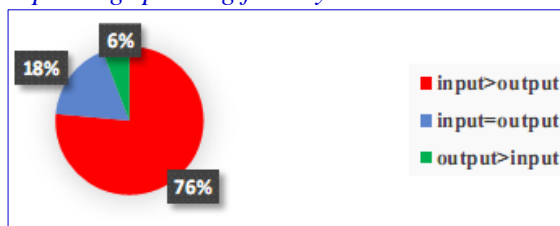
In sum, as it is appeared in the following table, the results of the analyzed data disclosed that thirteen out of seventeen participants believed that it was input that helped them pick up fluency in speaking English. Three out of seventeen, however, indicated that both input and output had equal effects on the improvement of their fluency and only one mentioned that he forced himself to speak even when input was not sufficient.

Figure 1: Roles of input and output in improving speaking fluency

Roles of Input and Output	Participants' Emphasis
Input	13 out of 17 participants gave more emphasis to input than output.
Input/Output	3 out of 17 participants gave equal emphasis to input and output.
Output	1 out of 17 participants gave more emphasis to output than input.

The above information can be graphically depicted below.

Figure 2: Proportion of input and output in improving speaking fluency



As to the second research question, the data uncovered that between the two sources of input, listening played a more pivotal role in improving speaking fluency than reading. All the participants unanimously stressed that listening had a powerful impact on their speaking fluency

and most noted they owed their fluency to this skill. For instance, participant 16 stated that “my fluency is the result of listening. ...Since childhood, I’ve been exposed to listening through cartoons, CDs, films, etc. from morning till night.” Or participant 11 unveiled that “for me, listening is so vital that my TV is always on.”

However, participants 6, 3, and 7, on the significance of exposure to vast amounts of listening and having consistency and persistency, respectively commented that

My speaking ability is the result of spending lots of time listening to different sources. When I listen a lot, it seems I get suffocated if I don’t talk. It’s because of the great amounts of information flowing out of my mind.

It took me about three years to be able to speak fluently after immersing myself to vast amounts of listening. After that, it seemed speaking was being inspired in me and I was able to speak easily without any effort. In fact, the more I’d listen, the more I was able to speak naturally and effortlessly. ... And learners should listen a lot to whatever they are interested in.

To improve your fluency, listen, listen, listen, and then talk. In last years, I have never spent a day without listening, it might have decreased, but I have never given it up. For example, I had to live for six months in another city in which the conditions of life were terrible, but I continued my listening schedule though I had lots of problems living there.

Moreover, the participants recounted that they were able to speak more fluently since they increased the time allocated to listening. It was divulged by participant 9 that “since I’ve increased the amount of time listening to cassettes for hundreds of times, my speaking ability has been refined and sounds more natural.”

From the above statements, this conclusion can be drawn that listening in childhood, dedicating a great amount of time to this skill, and having consistency and perseverance are the optimum conditions for a successful and efficient listening to thrive, and it is this type of listening that leads to fluency in speaking. In step with the above-mentioned points, Harmer (2015) points out that the input provided by listening can greatly improve the English language learning. He adds that listening is a vital skill and without it

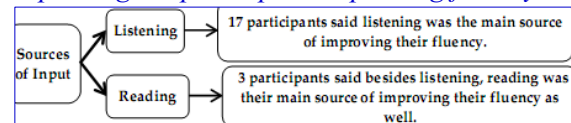
learners “cannot take part in conversations, listen to the radio, speak on the telephone, watch movies in English or attend presentations and lectures” (p. 336). In the same vein, Richards (2008, p. 1) remarks that “listening can provide much of the input and data that learners receive in language learning.” Moreover, Brown and Lee (2015) emphasize the intertwined relationship between listening and speaking. A study done by Zhang (2009), for instance, unveiled that being exposed to listening can develop students’ speaking ability so that they can get their language closer to the language spoken by English native speakers.

In addition to listening, all the participants also benefitted from reading. However, for three of them, reading served as the main source of input in improving their speaking fluency. In this regard, participant 5 mentioned that “my fluency is the result of reading a variety of texts”; participant 2 expressed that “I can concentrate more while reading because I can see the words. It also helps words and expressions stick in my mind for they are repeated several times in various texts.” And participant 14 said that “reading has helped me enrich my knowledge of what I’ve learned from movies.”

From the above remarks, it can be inferred that reading can be a major backup for listening if reading sources cover a variety of topics (e.g. sports, animals, science, history, medicine, etc.). The various topics in listening tasks are, willingly or unwillingly, covered in reading passages and the passages will broaden the learners’ scope of lexical chunks. The chunks, then, come to their help when they start speaking. Receiving input through reading corroborates the idea of Krashen (1989, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2014) who suggests that reading can provide a rich source of input through which words and idioms can be learned. In addition, as Nation (1995, p. 7) notes, “reading has long been seen as a major source of vocabulary growth” and in turn good knowledge of vocabulary is essential for speaking. Reading, on the one hand, can provide EFL learners with authentic texts which are necessary for real-life communicative purposes, and on the other hand, repeated encounters with language items they have already heard or met can affect their knowledge of grammar and fluency. The proportion of listening and

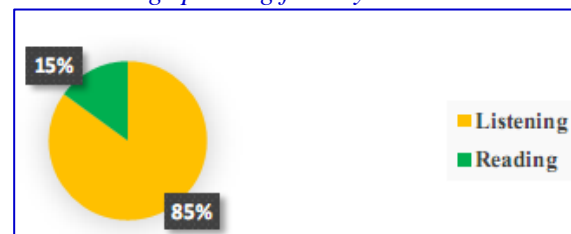
reading in enhancing the participants’ speaking fluency can be illustrated below-

Figure 3: Role of listening and reading in improving the participants’ speaking fluency



The above information can be graphically shown as follow-

Figure 4: Proportion of listening and reading in enhancing speaking fluency



With respect to the two productive skills, the participants gave special privilege to speaking than writing in boosting their speaking fluency. For instance, participant 7 stated:

Speaking is so crucial to me that I only speak English everywhere and to everyone, even on the bus or to the janitor of our English department. That’s why some people stare at me, but I don’t care.

and participant 16 said that

My brother and I speak English wherever we go, even when we visit our relatives. Sometimes, my grandmother jokingly says that we have changed the channel.

Or in relation to creating opportunities for speaking English in most (if not all) conditions, participant 13 related that

After listening to something, I try to create speaking opportunities for myself because it is essential for improving my speaking ability. I always have a daily plan to practice speaking. During school years, I always spoke English while taking a shower. I imagined the tiles, covering the walls of the bathroom, were people looking at me and listening to me. I talked to them loudly about everything. Producing language in that way helped me realize my errors and enhance my fluency.

According to the participants’ comments, speaking practice is fruitful if it is done constantly- everywhere, every time, and with everyone who knows the intended target language. Such a type of speaking had provided them with an opportunity to remember and use whatever they had learned earlier. Likewise, participant 10 remarked that through speaking, she fixed her linguistic problems:



Through speaking, I can notice my weaknesses and overcome them. That's why I meet my friends every day to speak English for about two hours.

Swain (1985) holds that speaking can be improved through speaking because you do not understand what your speaking weak points are until you start talking. In the same line, participant 8 noted that

Listening plays a significant role in improving my fluency, but it is speaking which helps me realize where I need to improve myself more.

Moreover, all the participants emphasized the role of 'practicing' in enhancing their speaking fluency and pointed out that the expression "practice makes perfect" holds absolutely true with speaking.

Some of the participants, however, used writing as a skill which had positive impacts on improving their speaking fluency. Participant 8 unveiled that "practice in sentence writing results in my speaking fluency." Or as it was mentioned by participant 7 "Through writing, I practice organizing sentences and that improves my fluency a lot."

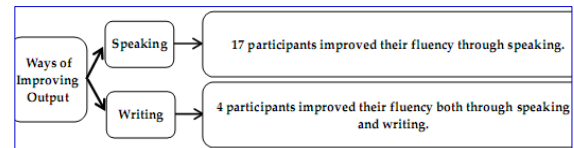
With regard to the close relation between writing and speaking, it is believed that both skills share some similar components and practicing one helps the speaker find her/his errors (Rivers, 1981; Myers, 1987; Nation & Newton, 2009; Brown & Lee, 2015). In accordance with this, participant 12 stated

Writing helps me find my errors and weaknesses in whatever I want to say or express, overcome my problems, and improve my speaking.

The above points confirm the results of a study conducted by Zhu (2007) and Abdolmanafi Rokni and Seifi (2014) who demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between speaking and writing, and dialog journal writing has an impact on learners' accuracy and fluency in speaking.

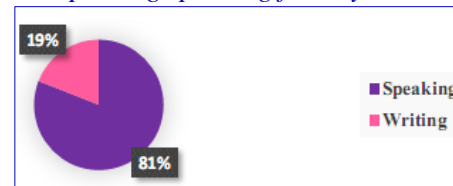
Given the two productive skills, as pictured in the following table, all seventeen participants recounted that they improved their input just through speaking and four of them indicated that besides speaking, writing was influential as well.

Figure: 5 Role of speaking and writing in improving the participants' speaking fluency



The above information can be graphically shown below-

Figure 6: Proportion of speaking and writing in improving speaking fluency



5. Conclusion

This paper strived to identify the contribution of input and output and each of the language skills in enhancing speaking fluency. Based on the findings, although both input and output affected the development of the participants' speaking fluency, the role of input was more eye-catching. Receiving huge amounts of input filled the learners' brain cells with massive amounts of information containing words, prefabricated phrases, and even various structures.

The findings showed that all language skills contributed to the improvement of the participants' speaking fluency and as a result, they supported the integrative nature of four language skills and that no skill can be mastered per se (Hinkel, 2006; Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Snow, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Brown & Lee, 2015).

Among four language skills, listening was more appealing in supplying input for improving speaking fluency. It was so crucial that the participants owed much of their fluency to the copious amounts of this skill. Accordingly, to develop fluency, language learners need to devote much of their time, effort, and energy to listening. Moreover, from what the participants said about the merits of exposure to massive amounts of listening, this point can be concluded that such an exposure makes the brain get so saturated with English input data that the listener becomes enthusiastic to automatically release them. Therefore, what is just needed is a trigger (e.g. a need, a class, someone who talks English, etc.) to intrigue one to express whatever s/he has heard. Huge amounts of listening also helped learners speak effortlessly. Thus, it can be concluded that listening should become a habit and receiving input via this skill should become an inseparable part of learners' daily schedule for developing their English-speaking fluency.

6. Implications of the study

The findings of the study can make EFL learners, syllabus designers, curriculum planners, material developers, and stakeholders like English language institutes, Ministries of Education, English language departments at universities, etc. aware of the essential role input and output along with their language skills fulfill in enhancement of speaking fluency and put further stress on listening as a skill which may have the greatest impact on speaking fluency.

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Appendix: 1 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) by Council of Europe (2001).

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE
C2	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also, has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and paralinguistic cues apparently effortlessly. Can intervene in his/her conversation in the joint discourse with fully natural turn taking, referencing, allowance making etc.	Can create coherent and well-structured discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectives and other cohesive devices.
C1	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a consistently difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to produce his remarks in order to get on or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions suitably to those of other speakers.	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectives and cohesive devices.
B2+					
B2	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conscious searching for words, and to use simple sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstandings, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language in a fairly even tempo although he/she can be hindered by or else searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution.
B1+					
B1	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used 'chunks' and patterns associated with more predictable situations.	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.	Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.
A2+					
A2	Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.	Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even through pauses, false starts and reformulations are very evident.	Can answer questions and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.	Can link groups of words with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.
A1	Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorised repertoire.	Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.	Can ask and answer questions about personal details. Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, re-phrasing and repair.	Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like 'and' or 'then'.

Appendix 2: A sample of interview questions

- At what age did you start learning English?
 How did you pick up speaking fluency?
 What was the role of input and output in improving your English-speaking fluency?
 What language skill (listening, reading, speaking, or writing) contributed more to the improvement of your English-speaking fluency?
 Which input skill (listening or reading) fulfilled a more prominent role in developing your speaking fluency?
 Which output skill (speaking or writing) served a more significant role in enhancing your speaking fluency?
 How much time did you dedicate to listening?
 What is your view about the amount of listening needed to reach speaking fluency?
 What type of listening can be fruitful? How did you practice listening?
 Etc.