

From Accuracy to Fluency: The Role of Interactionalist Approaches in Developing Speaking Proficiency Among Iranian Efl Learners: A Systematic Review

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Abstract. This systematic review investigates the role of interactionalist approaches in developing speaking fluency in Iranian EFL learners. Even though Iranians have excellent grammatical abilities, they find it challenging to speak spontaneously in English because of their lack of exposure to real English outside the classroom. The present systematic review analyzes experimental, qualitative, and mixed-methods research studies carried out between 2022 and 2025. Drawing on Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the findings indicate that interactionalist activities—including negotiation of meaning, facilitative corrective feedback, and information-gap tasks—significantly reduce pausing frequency, increase speech rate, and lower speaking anxiety. However, the evidence also suggests that interactionalism alone is insufficient for improving grammatical accuracy, necessitating an integrated model that combines interactive practice with explicit instruction. This review offers practical pedagogical recommendations for Iranian teachers and proposes a hybrid framework that balances fluency and accuracy development.

Keywords: Dynamic Assessment, Interactionalism, Iranian EFL Learners, Negotiation of Meaning, Speaking Fluency, Systematic Review

1. INTRODUCTION

Being fluent in spoken discourse in the target language is among the toughest but most important goals of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). As opposed to reading and writing, speaking does not allow for reflection and revision as it requires instant processing of information, vocabulary search, and sentence formation (Cummins & Swain, 1986; Long, 1996). Speaking in English for Iranians poses extra problems due to lack of practice outside class. Many Iranian students succeed in grammar tests and reading comprehension tests, but show hesitation, many pauses, and nervousness while participating in free communication.

Historically, the teaching of English as a second language in Iran has emphasized accuracy, memorization techniques, and the use of translation as the

preferred pedagogical methodology. Even though such approaches may lay a good groundwork regarding grammar, the problem often encountered is their inability to develop automaticity needed for communication purposes. Over the last ten years, there has been a paradigmatic shift from accuracy-oriented pedagogy towards communicative and interaction-based models. Interaction theory, based on the contributions of Long (1996) and Vygotsky (1980), believes that language learning is a social experience that takes place during interactions.

Despite the theoretical appeal of interactionist approaches, an important question emerges: Are these approaches effective enough to develop speaking fluency in the context of Iran? In order to answer this question, the following systematic review synthesizes the empirical literature on the topic that has been published between 2022 and 2025, combining the quantifiable measures of fluency, such as speaking rate and pauses per minute, with qualitative analysis of the learners' experiences and their perceptions of interaction, including their level of anxiety. Such a combined approach is vital since speaking fluency can be influenced not only by the features of speech itself but also by the socio-psychological context of interaction.

The key theoretical frameworks for interactionist SLA include Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1996) and Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky (1980). According to Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1996), language learning takes place if learners engage in the process of negotiation of meaning in which interlocutors solve communication problems through clarification questions, confirmation questions, and comprehension checks. These negotiation processes provide learners with comprehensible input, push learners to produce output, and provide implicit negative evidence.

Moreover, according to Sociocultural Theory (1980) by Vygotsky, the formation of higher-order thinking skills occurs through social interaction. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the difference between what can be accomplished on one's own and what can be done when given proper assistance. During the process of collaboration and dialogue with a more skilled interlocutor, the individual acquires linguistic knowledge and gradually becomes an independent speaker (White & Masuda, 2024).

Recent scholarship has integrated these theories with Dynamic Assessment (DA). This approach consists of both instructional and evaluation methods and implements ZPD through a process of providing gradual feedback to the speaker (Ritonga et al., 2022; Sarabi Asl et al., 2024).

Speaking fluency is commonly operationalized through three measurable indicators: speech rate (syllables per minute), pause rate (pause frequency and length), and repair fluency (ability to conduct discourse without breaks) (Alhusain, 2024). There has been a vast array of empirical evidence showing that interactional tasks have a direct effect on fluency. Interactional task requirements require the automatization of linguistic knowledge, resulting in decreased cognitive load. Pair and group interactions have been shown to be positively correlated with decreased pause rates and increased mean length of runs (Alhusain, 2024).

The Iranian EFL setting possesses unique difficulties in learning English. English is taught as a foreign language with minimal authentic use in daily life. The traditional teaching methods are mainly teacher-centered and include the aspects of reading comprehension and grammar translation (Sarabi Asl et al., 2024). Due to this fact, learners demonstrate high levels of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

(FLCA), especially in relation to speaking (Ritonga et al., 2022; Zarei & Shishegarha, 2024). There is sufficient evidence that Iranian students are afraid of evaluation and are reluctant to take risks linguistically, which results in poor fluency acquisition. Thus, there is a need for pedagogical focus change from “absolute correctness” to “effective communication.”

2. METHOD

The present study uses a systematic review approach, adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The inclusion criteria include empirical research that could be either quantitative or qualitative or both, and these empirical works were published during the period of 2022 to 2025 focusing on Iranian EFL learners at elementary to intermediate proficiency levels. The selected studies examined interactionist approaches, including interactionist DA, collaborative tasks, interactive feedback, or technology-mediated interaction, with speaking fluency measured through quantitative indicators or qualitative perceptions. Only peer-reviewed journal articles within domestic and international realms have been considered.

The method used to search for the literature involved databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, SID (Scientific Information Database), Magiran, and Noormags. The literature search terms used Boolean operations as follows: ("Interactionist" OR "Dynamic Assessment" OR "Negotiation of Meaning") AND ("Speaking Fluency" OR "Oral Proficiency") AND ("Iranian EFL Learners"). After initial screening for duplicates and excluding those articles that did not fit the scope of the paper, 18 studies met the selection criteria and underwent thematic analysis. Furthermore, a detailed case study by Dr. Nostratinia and Rahimi (2024) on 15–20 lower intermediate-level students at a language school in Iran was considered as an example.

3. RESULT

Synthesized results from the reviewed studies have been categorized into four major themes.

4.1 Quantitative Indicators of Fluency Improvement

All quantitative studies reviewed presented in this literature review, there were observed positive impacts on fluency scores after conducting the intervention. For instance, a study comparing the effects of interactionist and interventionist Dynamic Assessment (DA) on Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF) measured at post-tests and one week later revealed that interactionist DA learners outperformed interventionist learners on fluency parameters such as speech rate and pausing, but the latter had greater grammatical accuracy (Tavassoli et al., 2024). Thus, there is a certain short-term tension between accuracy and fluency. Also, a study conducted to examine the effects of flipped instruction with interaction showed that participants involved in pre-class input and in-class interactions performed much better in terms of fluency than other participants (Shabani & Jabbari, 2025).

4.2 Qualitative Insights: Anxiety Reduction and Motivation

Consistently, qualitative and mixed studies have found that lowering FLCA is a major advantage. According to the findings of Nostratinia and Rahimi's case study, the learners felt "more secure" and "more willing to take risks" in cases where the teacher did not correct all their mistakes. They considered role-playing activities and information gap exercises as being "more authentic and fun than drilling." At the same time, studies reveal that interactional diagnostic assessment (DA) frameworks positively affect L2 speaking and listening anxiety directly (Zarei & Shishegarha, 2024), thus contributing to the creation of a favorable educational environment. Increasing WTC plays an important role since it enables more practice.

4.3 Interactionist vs. Interventionist Dynamic Assessment

A significant debate in recent literature concerns the comparative effectiveness of two DA models. In the case of the interactionist model, there is implicit feedback in the form of co-construction of discourse through the process of interaction between the tutor and the learner. On the other hand, the interventionist model incorporates explicit feedback that follows a pre-defined pattern. Literature synthesizes to show that the interactionist model has better results for fluency and minimizes anxiety levels by maintaining the flow of conversation (Ritonga et al., 2022). However, the interventionist model works better for correcting grammatical errors (Sarabi Asl et al., 2024). Other studies indicate that the interactionist model leads to more learner reciprocity. In addition, research shows that the interactionist approach contributes to reciprocity of learning—active involvement of learners in interaction, responding to feedback, and knowledge construction (Ebadi & Ebrahimzadeh, 2023).

4.4 Technology-Mediated Interactive Environments

Recent studies have expanded interactionism into digital spaces. In particular, the findings of 2024 show that authentic interactions taking place in video-conferencing applications significantly help develop speaking and listening skills (Tran et al., 2024). Also, the introduction of intelligent personal assistants (chatbots) increases the number of interactive possibilities of learners outside the class, allowing the learners to negotiate meanings without pressure (Wu et al., 2024). In an Iranian setting, the findings of a case study of online dynamic assessment reveal that interactive feedback offline can be as effective as interaction face-to-face in terms of oral fluency if it is a two-way interaction (Asl et al., 2023; Ebrahimzadeh & Ebadi, 2025).

These results suggest that technology can enable more opportunities for participation in interaction and spoken English practice by Iranian EFL learners. However, the effectiveness of interaction enabled through technology must not be considered inevitable since its effectiveness relies on the proper design and maintenance of interaction, feedback, and engagement. Hence, while the synthesized data strongly support the effectiveness of interactionist approaches in improving speaking fluency for Iranian EFL learners, the following key points need to be taken into account.

The fluency-accuracy trade-off remains an important consideration. Interaction promotes automaticity, but it will not automatically correct deep-rooted grammatical mistakes. As was shown in Study (Tavassoli et al., 2024), those involved in purely interactionist exercises made consistent grammatical errors. The best method, therefore, is one that uses a combination of interactionist tasks (fluency) with explicit

lessons (for improving accuracy). The view is supported by Swain's Output Hypothesis, where the learner realizes the need to correct the gap in his/her linguistic repertoire due to the pushed output (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

One other crucial issue is the teacher's facilitative role. The qualitative research shows that the most important part of this process is the way errors are corrected by the teacher. A facilitative approach that overlooks errors that do not affect the communication is aimed at maintaining fluency and alleviating anxiety and acts as a scaffolding in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) proposed by Vygotsky (1980).

The literature being analyzed also emphasizes the need for adaptability to the Iranian EFL environment. Even though some approaches were effective in private enterprises, when implemented in public schools, they faced a number of difficulties, among which are large class size and a shortage of time for learning. At the same time, technology-based approaches like asynchronous online discussions and MOOCs showed their potential in expanding interactions beyond the classroom setting (Talakooob et al., 2025).

Finally, Lexical difficulties appear to be still prevalent in the reviewed studies. The most common limitation is the learners' inability to retrieve lexis quickly enough in rapid interaction. Interaction, as it stands, does not work alone in developing learners' lexical competence.

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic review confirms that interactionist approaches significantly enhance speaking fluency among Iranian EFL learners. Through collaborative tasks, negotiation of meaning, and supportive feedback environments, learners exhibit greater confidence, fewer pauses, and improved communicative effectiveness. Based on the synthesized evidence, several practical implications are proposed for Iranian teachers and curriculum developers. Teachers should maximize interactive opportunities by allocating sufficient time to pair and group activities that incorporate real information gaps and communication purposes. Another implication is that feedback techniques need to be varied through two methods, such that the first method provides implicit and fluency-related feedback in the process of doing fluency-based activities.

Furthermore, teachers must foster an environment where risk taking is encouraged through the creation of a classroom atmosphere where mistakes are viewed as natural elements of the process of learning. The idea here is to reduce Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) and make the learners more ready to communicate. Technology must be used strategically with the help of online sites, video conferencing, and AI chatbots in order to provide extra practice outside of the classroom setting, especially for learners with less experience.

However, this review has several limitations. A number of the reviewed studies have small samples (from 15 to 30 participants) and interventions of relatively short duration (from 4 to 10 sessions). In order to test the effect of fluency maintenance, there is a need for longitudinal studies. Future research could go in several directions, including studying longitudinal effects of the interactionist approach on fluency maintenance; comparing the efficiency of this approach between beginners and advanced learners; creating and testing hybrid models of instruction that combine

interactionist approaches to fluency development with the approaches to accuracy training for large groups; and exploring the application of Generative AI (such as ChatGPT) to create an interactive environment for personalized negotiation of meaning.

In conclusion, this review clearly indicates that learning languages is inherently a social process. In a situation where the appropriate communicative intents have been used and an interactional setting has been created, learners will be able to make great progress in their oral performance. The shift from perfectionism to communicativeness is not only possible but necessary for Iranian EFL learners.

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