The impact of task type and pre-task planning condition on the accuracy of intermediate EFL learners’ oral performance

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Abstract: Task-based language teaching comprises both a novel language teaching approach and a burgeoning area of study in the field of second-language acquisition. This study investigated the effects of task type and planning conditions on the accuracy of learners’ oral performance during pre-task planning. Eighty intermediate EFL learners were assigned to four task conditions: individual-planning personal task, individual-planning decision-making task, group-planning personal task, and group-planning decision-making task (n= 20). Individual task performances were scored for accuracy prior to the treatment sessions. During the treatment sessions, the participants completed the tasks under different planning conditions. Results of statistical analyses revealed that pre-task planning conditions and the task type are effective in enhancing the accuracy of learners’ oral production. The findings lend support to the view that there are advantages in selecting and implementing appropriate task-based conditions to develop the accuracy of language learners’ oral performance. The implications for task-based language teaching are explained and some suggestions for further research are offered.

Subjects: Applied Linguistics; English Language; Language Teaching & Learning

Keywords: personal task; decision making task; individual-planning; group-planning; oral performance accuracy

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
The main goal of task-based language teaching method is to provide tasks similar to the learners’ real life and, more importantly, to make language learning meaningful. During the last decade, there has been a substantial amount of research on tasks. Within the study of tasks, one construct which has been given much attention is planning. In this study, the effect of task type and pre-task planning condition on Iranian EFL learners’ accuracy in speaking ability was explored. The findings indicated that different type of tasks along with different planning conditions during pre-task planning stage contributed to raising the accuracy level of foreign language learners’ speaking proficiency. The findings of the study have advantages for the EFL teachers in terms of the deployment of different tasks and planning conditions to foster the speaking accuracy of their learners.

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1. Introduction

The failure of conventional approaches and methods in language pedagogy to offer naturalistic language learning in which language is utilized meaningfully and communicatively led to a paradigm shift within language teaching towards the more learner-centered communicative methodologies (Ellis, 2003). One of these advances is known as task-based language teaching (TBLT), a rational expansion of communicative language teaching (CLT). TBL utilizes a variety of tasks in the classroom environment as an instrument to make language learning a meaningful practice in which an outcome is preferred.

From a historical perspective, an emphasis on tasks as the basic components of second-language teaching appeared when scholars paid attention to tasks as second-language acquisition research tools in the middle of 1980s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Some of the advocates of TBLT (e.g., Bygate, 2016b; East, 2012; Ellis, 2009) regard this change to be a logical development of CLT because it employs some principles informing part of the CLT movement from 1980s. In TBLT, it is actually argued that involving learners in task work provides a better environment for the activation of learning processes than form-focused tasks. This seems to eventually provide superior opportunities for language learning. As revealed by Ellis (2005), task-based learning comes from the assumption that language can be acquired by doing when attention is concentrated on meaning. TBLT, consequently, structures the learning procedure by tasks to be carried out in the target language not by functions, notions, topics, and structures.

Ellis argues that pre-task planning could be classified into two types: (a) strategic planning, which “entails learners preparing to perform the task by considering the content they will need to encode and how to express this content”; and (b) rehearsal, which embraces “task repetition with the first performance of the task viewed as a preparation for a subsequent performance” (Ellis, 2005, p. 3). Van Patten (1990, 1996) points out that pre-task planning enhances speech accuracy since it is capable of freeing up L2 learners’ attentional resources to pay attention to form, presuming that in real communication, meaning takes precedence over form. Pre-task may encourage learners to allocate more equal their attentional resources between meaning and form (Bygate, 2016a; Skehan, 2014). Meanwhile, pre-task planning promotes speech fluency because it allows L2 learners to process the content and language of their planned speech at a deeper and more meaningful level; furthermore, it provides the learners the opportunity to apply the content and language of their speech prior to producing it orally for real communication (East, 2014; Long, 2015).

Ellis (2003) maintains that the learners’ ability to do various tasks is reliant on a set of parameters involving the methodological procedures that are employed to teach a task. These procedures are referred to as task procedures and can enhance or reduce the processing burden placed on the learner. These can be categorized into pre-task procedures, during task procedures (e.g. restricting the time for doing the task) and post-task procedures (e.g. repeating the task done). The first group comprises the use of pre-task activities—for instance, planning time (i.e., offering students the opportunity to plan before undertaking the task at hand). In effect, as Ellis (2003, p. 348) argues, pre-task planning is “the process by which learners plan what they are going to say or write before commencing a task”.

2. Review of literature

As one of the advocates of task-based methodology, Skehan (1998) maintains that “the extent to which learners accord importance to the accuracy of their language, expand the complexity of their expression or attend to the fluency of their performance” (p. 188) can be affected by various facets of tasks and conditions under which the tasks are performed. Planning is among the conditions creating such an impact. Foster and Skehan (1999) showed that solitary planners produced language in oral mode that was more complex, more fluent, and based upon longer turns. Furthermore, teacher-fronted planners produced more accurate language, whereas group-based planners seemed less fluent. While the no planning group produced the less complex...
language, they often do not differ from the other groups in terms of accuracy when compared to group-based and solitary conditions. They also found that the teacher-fronted condition produced the most balanced performance. This group produced noticeably the highest level accuracy, and did not perform poorly on other measures.

Ahmadian, Tavakoli, and Vahid Dastjerdi (2015) investigated the joint impacts of task-based careful online planning condition and the storyline structure of a task on L2 oral performance in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Results demonstrated that the participants who carried out the structured task under careful online planning condition generated logically more complex, accurate, and fluent language. On the other hand, those who carried out the unstructured task under pressured online planning condition attained the lowest scores in terms of all three areas of speech production.

In a more recent study, Atai and Nasiri (2017) explored the impacts of strategic planning, online planning, strategic planning, and online planning combined (joint planning), and no planning on the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of oral productions in two simple and complex narrative tasks. The findings showed that no planning in both tasks was the least beneficial. Strategic planning guided the learners to boost both their complexity and fluency significantly in the narrative simple task and only their fluency in the complex task. Online planning assisted the participants to enhance their accuracy significantly both in the simple and complex tasks. Finally, joint planning led to the significant improvement of accuracy and fluency in the simple task on the one hand, and complexity and accuracy in the complex task on the other.

Overall, despite the host of research conducted on the effects of pre-task planning on L2 production, relatively meager attention has been paid to the simultaneous influence of task type and participatory structure on the learners’ speaking accuracy. The main motivation of the study, however, is to help inform rational pedagogical decision-taking by language teachers who aim to implement, and possibly adjust, TBLT to their own classroom setting. Meanwhile, it is essential to double check the learners’ levels of accuracy in personal and decision-making tasks with intermediate level learners of language proficiency. Therefore, the present study attempts to scrutinize the effects that the implementation of different task types could have on the accuracy of learners’ speaking through a classroom-based study incorporating an instructional treatment component which is missing in previously conducted planning studies. By observing two task types of different levels of cognitive complexity (i.e., personal and decision-making tasks), the present study sought to bridge the gap existing in previous studies concerning the clear effects of pre-task planning on the participants’ speaking accuracy in the two tasks and to broaden horizons in relation to the roles attributed to planning. Hence, in order to achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions are raised:

1. Does task type affect intermediate EFL learners’ accuracy in speaking?
2. Does pre-task planning condition affect intermediate EFL learners’ accuracy in speaking?
3. Does pre-task planning condition (i.e., individual planning and group planning) exert different effects on the accuracy of EFL learners’ speaking while performing personal tasks?
4. Does pre-task planning condition (i.e., individual planning and group planning) exert different effects on the accuracy of EFL learners’ speaking while performing decision-making tasks?

3. Method

3.1. Participants
The participants of this study were 80 Iranian intermediate EFL learners recruited from among 100 learners in four intact classes at two foreign language institutes in Ahvaz, Iran. They were all female and their age range was between 14 and 21. They were considered as intermediate level learners, parallel to B1 based on CEFR taxonomy, in accordance with the language institute’s
standards and the placement tests that they had taken. Nevertheless, to ensure the participants’ homogeneity, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered. The ultimate participants of the study were 80 learners whose scores in the proficiency test fell between one standard deviation above or below the mean. Due to limitations, the study was conducted in intact classes; therefore, it was not possible to exclude the participants whose scores were two standard deviations above or below the mean. In fact, such participants were present in intact classes and their scores were not considered in the analysis of the study.

3.2. Materials
Two sets of tasks were employed for the treatment sessions: a “personal set” and a ‘decision making’ set. As Skehan (2001) points out, these task types were selected as maximally representative of tasks utilized in language-teaching textbooks. For instance, in one of the personal tasks the learners were asked to instruct their partner how to return to their homes, and then turn off an oven which has been left on and in the balloon task as a decision-making task, the learners were required to defend of actor, politician and EFL teacher and argue a position as to who should be thrown from the balloon which is losing altitude and the only way of preventing a crash is to jettison one or more of the balloon passengers.

3.3. Experimental procedure
At the beginning of the study, in order to determine the participants’ accuracy level in their oral production and to ensure that there was not any significant difference between the groups, they had to be pretested. To this end, participants were all recorded on a picture description task. The researcher invited the participants into a room where they were required to complete the task one by one.

Given that this study was conducted in language institutes, exact randomization of individuals was not possible. Consequently, the researcher had to make use of semi-randomization procedure as a way of dealing with non-randomization of individuals through conducting the study in four intact classes. The 80 participants were allocated to 4 equal-sized groups of 20 each: individual-planning personal task (IPPT group), individual-planning decision-making task (IPDT group), group-planning personal task (GPPT group), and the group-planning decision-making task (GPDT group);

The treatment of the study was conducted in 6 sessions during which the participants completed two different task types under individual and group planning conditions. The learners in the personal task groups, i.e., [IPPT] group and [GPPT] group, carried out 6 personal tasks and the learners in the decision-making task groups, i.e., [IPDT] group and [GPDT] group, completed 6 decision-making tasks during the treatment sessions (one task per session). The participants in all four groups were given a ten-minute planning time after the task had been explained and before it began in the course of which they were required to take notes about what they were going to say but were told that these notes would be taken away before they began to speak. The choice of planning time was in accordance with Crookes (1989), Foster and Skehan (1996) and (Wendel, 1997) in order to reach more comparable results with those of previous planning studies. All instructions were provided in the participants’ mother tongue. The participants were provided with planning guidelines giving advice on the relevant content, lexical items and linguistic forms they will need to encode and how to express this content. In this regard, the planning can be said to be guided rather than unguided (see, e.g., Skehan & Foster, 2005). However, the conditions under which they completed the tasks were different. The learners in individual-planning groups, i.e., [IPPT] group and [IPDT] group, performed the planning individually and the participants in the group-planning groups, i.e., [GPPT] group and [GPDT] group, were told to do the related tasks in groups of four. They were asked to collaboratively work together and plan what they wanted to articulate later. It helped them exchange their ideas and share what they had in their mind about the task. It is necessary to mention that although they worked together, they were required to
keep their own ideas and try to benefit from the positive ideas of the more experienced members of the group.

Finally, in the last session of the experiment, all participants were given one personal task and one decision-making task, which constitute the database of this study. The reason for a monologic task performance, as in Yuan and Ellis (2003), is that this eliminates the likelihood of interactional variables affecting learner performance measures. The participants’ performances were tape recorded, transcribed and scored based on the measures chosen for assessing the accuracy of their oral production.

3.4. Measurement of the variable
The accuracy measures chosen to evaluate the learners’ improvement in their oral performance involved the percentage of clauses that were not erroneous in terms of syntax, morphology or word order and the percentage of all verbs that were used correctly in terms of tense, aspect, modality, and subject–verb agreement. The transcribed narrations were scored based upon the measures adopted for evaluating the accuracy. To make sure that the calculation of the accuracy scores was performed accurately, 30% of the data were scored by an independent expert colleague. Inter-rater reliability coefficients magnitude was .93 for accuracy scores.

4. Results

4.1. The homogeneity of participants
In order to homogenize the participants, the OPT proficiency test was administered and those who got scores one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen. Results of the OPT are presented in Table 1.

The mean score was 36.93 and standard deviation was 8.36. Thus, given one standard deviation above and below the mean, those participants whose scores were between 45.29 and 28.57 were selected for this study (36.93 + 8.36 = 45.29 and 36.93–8.36 = 28.57). As a result, 80 students, out of 100 students remained as the major participants of this study.

To check the participants’ level of proficiency, their scores on the OPT was analyzed through the Analysis of Variance. Results indicated that no statistically significant group differences were found in the OPT proficiency scores (F = 849, Sig. = .47, see Table 2).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for homogeneity of the participants

|                  | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
|------------------|----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Test of Proficiency | 100 | 17.00   | 49.00   | 36.93  | 8.36           |
| Valid N (list wise) | 100 |         |         |        |                |

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for proficiency level of the participants

|                  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig. |
|------------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|------|
| Between Groups   | 180.13         | 3  | 60.04       | .84   | .47  |
| Within Groups    | 5380.35        | 76 | 70.79       |       |      |
| Total            | 5560.48        | 79 |             |       |      |

Note. p < 0.05
To see if the participants' pretest scores were similar or different, paired-sample tests was applied. Results of this test indicated that the pretest scores were not significantly different over different groups (See Table 3).

4.2. Results of one-way ANOVA
To answer the first research question, a one-way ANOVA was performed to measure the effects of task type on the students’ performance. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in participants’ performance on the two task types ($F = 18.04$, Sig. = .000, see Table 4).

When the finding of one-way ANOVA is to reject the null hypothesis, it means that at least one of the means is different from the other related means. Therefore, it is required to find the place of difference. In such cases, Scheffe and Tukey tests come into play. Both tests tend to find if pairs of means are different. In studies with equal sample sizes, both tests can be used interchangeably. Therefore, after analyzing the data by one-way ANOVA, the Scheffe test was run to make pairwise comparisons among different task type planning conditions. Findings of this analysis revealed that individual planning personal tasks (IPPT) are significantly different from group planning personal tasks (GPPT) and group planning decision-making tasks (GPDT). Therefore, it confirms that the task type is effective in performing speaking skill (Table 5).

To find an answer for the second research question, a one-way ANOVA was run. Results showed that there was a statistically significant difference in students’ performance in different pre-task conditions ($F = 6.71$, Sig. = .000, see Table 6). As a result, pre-task planning conditions affected the learners’ speaking accuracy.

To confirm the results of one-way ANOVA for the effects of pre-task planning conditions on accuracy of speaking, Tukey post hoc test was applied. This test is usually done after one-way ANOVA. Results of this test given in Table 7 show that the differences between personal and decision-making pre-tasks are significant.

### Table 3. Paired-samples tests for the pretest scores

| Paired Differences | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------|
|                    | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | Lower | Upper | t  | df | Sig. |
| Pair 1             | 1.80 | 4.06           | .90             | 2.90  | 0.90  | 1.10 | 19  | 0.28 |
| Pair 2             | 1.06 | 3.92           | .87             | 2.48  | 1.18  | 0.74 | 19  | 0.46 |
| Pair 3             | 1.00 | 3.93           | .87             | 1.74  | 1.94  | 0.11 | 19  | 0.91 |
| Pair 4             | 1.10 | 3.93           | .88             | 1.49  | 2.19  | 0.39 | 19  | 0.69 |

### Table 4. One-way ANOVA for the effects of task type

| Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F      | Sig. |
|----------------|----|-------------|--------|------|
| Between Groups | 54.450 | 1 | 54.450 | 18.046 | .000* |
| Within Groups | 235.350 | 78 | 3.017 |      |      |
| Total          | 289.800 | 79 |        |      |      |

*Note. P < 0.05
To check if the effects of pre-task planning conditions (i.e., individual planning, and group planning) exert different effects on the accuracy of learners' speaking while performing personal tasks, a two-way ANOVA was run (Table 8). This statistical procedure was used since effects of two independent variables among given groups were assessed. Results of this statistical procedure indicated that pre-task planning conditions are effective in performing personal tasks among intermediate EFL learners.

In a similar procedure, a two-way ANOVA was run to see if pre-task planning conditions (i.e., individual planning, and group planning) exert different effects on the accuracy of EFL learners' speaking while performing decision-making tasks. Results of this analysis are given in Table 9.

Table 5. Scheffe test for accuracy speaking scores across different task conditions

|          | Mean Differences | Std. Error | Sig. | Lower | Upper |
|----------|------------------|------------|------|-------|-------|
| IPPT     | IPDT             | .7500      | .54  | .60   | -.81  | 2.31  |
|          | GPPT             | 1.900*     | .54  | .01   | .33   | 3.46  |
|          | GPDT             | 2.150*     | .54  | .003  | .58   | 3.71  |
| IPDT     | IPPT             | -.7500     | .54  | .60   | -2.31 | .81   |
|          | GPPT             | 1.150      | .54  | .23   | -.41  | 2.71  |
|          | GPDT             | 1.400      | .54  | .09   | -.16  | 2.96  |
| GPPT     | IPPT             | -1.900*    | .54  | .01   | -3.46 | -.33  |
|          | IPDT             | -1.150     | .54  | .23   | -2.71 | .41   |
|          | GPDT             | .25        | .54  | .97   | -1.31 | 1.81  |
| GPDT     | IPPT             | -2.150*    | .54  | .003  | -3.71 | -.58  |
|          | IPDT             | -1.400     | .54  | .09   | -2.96 | .16   |
|          | GPPT             | -.25       | .54  | .97   | -1.81 | 1.31  |

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6. One-way ANOVA for the effects of pre-task planning conditions

|                          | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F    | Sig. |
|--------------------------|----------------|----|-------------|------|------|
| Between Groups           | 60.700         | 3  | 20.233      | 6.71 | .000*|
| Within Groups Total      | 229.100        | 76 | 3.014       |      |      |
| Total                    | 289.800        | 79 |             |      |      |

*Note. P < 0.05

Table 7. Tukey test for accuracy of speaking scores across different pre-task conditions

|          | Subset | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|----------|--------|---|---|---|
| IPPT     | 13.500 | 13.750 | 14.900 | 15.650 |
| IPDT     | 13.750 | 14.900 | 15.650 |
| GPPT     | .09 | .046* | 15.650 |
| GPDT     | 14.900 | 15.650 |

To check if the effects of pre-task planning conditions (i.e., individual planning, and group planning) exert different effects on the accuracy of learners' speaking while performing personal tasks, a two-way ANOVA was run (Table 8). This statistical procedure was used since effects of two independent variables among given groups were assessed. Results of this statistical procedure indicated that pre-task planning conditions are effective in performing personal tasks among intermediate EFL learners.

In a similar procedure, a two-way ANOVA was run to see if pre-task planning conditions (i.e., individual planning, and group planning) exert different effects on the accuracy of EFL learners' speaking while performing decision-making tasks. Results of this analysis are given in Table 9.
As the data presented in Table 9 shows, pre-task planning conditions (i.e., individual planning, and group planning) exert different effects on the accuracy of EFL learners’ speaking while performing decision-making tasks (F = 96.71, Sig. = 0.00).

4.3. Results of paired-samples t-tests
To determine which pre-task planning conditions was more effective in the personal or decision-making tasks, pretest and posttest scores of each group were compared through the paired-samples t-test. Results of this analysis are given in Table 10.

As the results in Table 10 reveal, statistically significant differences were found between pretest and posttest scores of all four intact groups: t = 5.50 and sig. = .000 for GPPT, t = 5.46 and sig. = .000 for GPDT, t = 3.60 and sig. = .002 for IPPT, t = 4.98 and sig. = .000 for IPDT. These findings confirm that planning conditions had significant effects on learners’ performance in personal and decision-making tasks. Therefore, both planning conditions were effective in terms of fostering the accuracy of learners’ oral performance.

5. Discussion
In this study, the influence of the implementation of different conditions of pre-task planning through the employment of two task types on the accuracy of learners' oral production was investigated. The first noteworthy finding in the current study is that, overall, participants improved their production accuracy with the aid of planning on the tasks.
Regarding the first research question posed pertaining to the impact of task type on learners' accuracy in speaking, results revealed that individual planning personal tasks were significantly different from group planning personal task and group planning decision-making tasks. This finding is in line with the involvement load hypothesis put forth by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001). They argued that incidental tasks with a higher degree of involvement load are more conducive to the kind of processing that is deemed crucial for learning. The findings in this study are in accord with the findings of Ellis (1987), Foster and Skehan (1996), Mehnert (1998) and Li, Chen, and Sun (2015) who found positive impact on the accuracy of learners' oral performance on different task types. The reason may also lie in Kuiken and Vedder (2007) argument stating that “task complexity does have an effect on linguistic performance, in the sense that an increase in cognitive task complexity leads to a more accurate text, suggesting that students pay more attention to language form” (p.130). Furthermore, the findings emanating from this study conform with Guerrero’s (2005) study and Skehan and Foster (1997) work which showed greater accuracy for a task with a clear inherent structure like the decision-making task in the current study.

The second research question was concerned with the impact of pre-task planning on the learners' accuracy in speaking. As the results revealed, there was a statistically significant difference in students' performance in different pre-task conditions. This study also found that not only did pre-task planning condition influence the learners' oral accuracy but also all groups enjoyed a higher accuracy in the tasks thereby affirming the effectiveness of pre-task planning. This finding is compatible with previous empirical studies (Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008; Mofidi, 2005; Rahimpour & Hazar, 2008; Roohi, 2006; Seifoori, 2009; Wang, 2014; Yuan & Ellis, 2003) regarding the effectuality of planning for promoting accuracy in EFL learners' oral speech. Moreover, Ellis (2005) asserts that accuracy improved, since “within-task planning may prove beneficial to formulation and also afford time for the controlled processing required for monitoring. As a result, accuracy might increase” (Ellis, 2005, p. 14). The increased accuracy can also be justified drawing on Levelt's (1989) model which postulates that under planning condition participants resort to their explicit knowledge and are therefore able to generate more accurate sentences during the formulation phase of speech production because they have time to select the structures they want to translate their conceptualization into. Based on Levelt's model, the grammatical correctness of the speech is primarily determined at the formulation phase of speech production. Because of the restrictions on the attentional resources and due to learners' tendency to prioritize meaning over form (Skehan, 1998, 2007), when learners perform the tasks under time pressure, they are likely to lay more emphasis on the prelinguistic conceptualization phase and, to some degree, ignore form in favour of meaning. On the contrary, when learners have ample time to complete the task, they might allot their attentional resources to the formulation phase and to self-monitoring of the internal speech. At this phase, the learner tends to confer with his or her explicit knowledge, because one of the conditions that contributes to the retrieval of information from explicit knowledge is when learners have enough time for task completion, i.e. unpressured task performance (DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2006; Erlam, 2006).

As for the third and fourth research questions concerning the effect of individual and group pre-task planning conditions on the learners' accuracy in speaking while performing personal and decision-making tasks, results demonstrated that both individual and group planning conditions were effective in performing personal and decision-making tasks among intermediate EFL learners. The learners in the individual condition used the available planning time and engaged rather frequently in private speech. This condition enables learners to self-select what to say, caters to individual differences, develops independence, and offers scope for private experimentation. Meanwhile, the learners in the group work condition were observed to collaborate actively and to focus on both content and form. This finding is consistent with the results that Foster and Skehan (1996, 1999), and Ahmadian et al. (2015) obtained. These studies suggest that different task types had an impact on the accuracy of the task performers' production. However, these results are in contrast with those of Crookes (1989) in that here planning is connected with a greater degree of accuracy. One potential explanation for this discrepancy is due to the nature
of the tasks themselves. Crookes (1989) tasks, for instance, a LEGO assembly, were classroom tasks and did not have much association with the participants’ real lives. They were, quite simply, instruments for the conveyance of neutral and arbitrary information. The personal and decision-making tasks in this study contrast with these to some extent. In the first case, learners described an aspect of their actual lives, while in the second they had to fall back on their own system of values and opinions. Tarone (1985) points out that discourse prominence can affect the level of accuracy on a task, specifically when syntax and morphology have discoursal value to indicate meaning. Even though this is, of course, based on speculation, it may be the case that task performers are guided toward a greater extent of exactness and accuracy when they can utilize planning conditions to invest the language they use in tasks with more personal importance (Foster & Skehan, 1996).

6. Pedagogical implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research

This study originally emanated from an intention to compare four different planning conditions aiming to enrich our understanding of the impact of different planning types on learners’ oral accuracy. The most important contribution of this study is that it provides L2 learners and instructors with a vivid explanation of how planning affected the L2 learners’ (a) cognitive planning processes, (b) their application of strategic plans, and (c) the quality of their speech. The findings have significant implications for several areas. In terms of pedagogical practice, the findings of this study suggest that pre-task planning can promote an optimal balance of attention between the planning of meaning and the planning of form. Furthermore, teachers and language instructors can assist L2 learners to augment the accuracy of their speech by manipulating planning conditions and giving ample time to learners to plan their speaking output in advance. Teachers can also include planning conditions in terms of individual and group in their daily teaching programs to enable learners to balance their quality of speech. Manipulating EFL learners’ language performance in predictable ways by providing them with the opportunity to prepare for the task performance helps them to produce the language that is more accurate. Meanwhile, in terms of task-based research, such an implementation condition may be specifically beneficial for building the relationship between task-as-work-plan and task-as-process in a task-based educational context, and therefore giving more evidence in support of the validity of task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2009).

Like most experimental studies, this study has got its own shortcomings that need to be taken into account in future research if we are to fully realize the contributions of planning conditions to both our understanding of L2 development as well as our L2 pedagogical practices. The participants of this study were selected from female students in four intact classes enrolled in English at two foreign language institutes. The sample size in this study was small. Other researches with larger sample need to be conducted in order to obtain new results with more generalizability power. The present study did not take into account different levels of proficiency. It included only intermediate level learners as participants. To study the effects of planning time on the different aspects of oral performance, different levels of proficiency should be included in the study. Similar studies may be conducted to investigate the similarities and differences for different course-levels (e.g., pre-intermediate and higher levels) of students and for various age-levels (e.g., junior and senior high school students) of participants. Different results might be observed as a result of interaction among different conditions of planning. It is also important to carry out research on other task types to investigate the predictability of the language features related to such tasks. Accordingly, in order to solidify the argument regarding the roles of planning in L2 acquisition, future studies need to be designed to investigate the interaction among the various factors including planning durations, other task types, learners at other proficiency levels, that influence the quality of pre-task planning and its subsequent effect on learners’ accuracy in speaking.
Lastly, it would be fruitful if this quantitative study could be complemented by qualitative studies which explore the students’ perceptions toward the different types of planning using qualitative research techniques including diary entries, classroom observation, and think-aloud protocols. Further studies may also be required to engage the language methodologies and language testing as the other pedagogical factors in the instruction and use of different types of planning and their influence on the promotion of second languages.

7. Conclusion
Over the past two decades, SLA scholars with a cognitive inclination have attempted to recognize task design characteristics and implementation variables which might reduce the cognitive load of tasks for language learners and channel task performers’ attentional capacity to different dimensions of language in predictable ways (Skehan, 1998). The major contribution that this study makes to the existing literature is the discovery that different pre-task planning conditions positively impact the EFL learners’ speaking accuracy. The findings of this study are supported by information processing theory (Foster & Skehan, 1999; Skehan & Foster, 2001) in which human beings’ processing capacity is limited and does not allow the speaker to focus his attention to all aspects of language at the time of task performance. The findings are also in line with Swain’s (1985) output hypothesis, that in order to speak we have to actually speak. With regard to the task performance, learners may be pushed to notice their problems and try to repair them in their actual performance.

Finally, it should be mentioned that an unanswered query still remains, that is, what learners really do as they involve in planning. This issue is of utmost significance due to the fact that “planning” is fundamentally a construct, and all we presently know regarding its impacts and the psycholinguistic processes that this direct learners to involve in is based upon the assumptions extracted from the results of rigidly controlled experimental manipulations (Ellis, 2005). Therefore, it may be high time we put more emphasis on the perspective from the learner’s point of view (Ortega, 2005) so as to closely examine what learners do when they perform planning. The construct validity of such data collection methods will put us in a more proper place to depict, elucidate and generalize the results of research as to the impacts of careful planning on different facets of language acquisition.

Funding
The author received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information
Cite this article as: The impact of task type and pre-task planning condition on the accuracy of intermediate EFL learners’ oral performance, Ali Reza Khoram, Cogent Education (2019), 6: 1675466.

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