A Comparative Study on the Effect of Individual, Pair and Team work on Speaking Fluency Of Iranian Elementary EFL Learners

Seyed Hossein Hosseini¹, Morteza Bakhtiarvand², Soudabeh Tabatabaei³

¹Department of TEFL, Khorramshahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khorramshahr, Iran.
²English Language Department, Ministry of Education, Andimeshk, Khuzestan, Iran
³Linguistics Department, University of Mysore, India

*Corresponding Author email: M_Bakhtiarvand@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: The present research investigated the effect of individual, pair, and team work on the speaking fluency of Iranian elementary EFL learners. A placement test was administered to a population of one hundred and fifty four EFL learners at Khorramshahr Ayandehsazan Language Center and seventy five learners were selected as elementary level participants of this study. The participants were randomly divided into three groups of twenty five: Individual Work Group (IWG), Pair Work Group (PWG), and Team Work Group (TWG). The instructional period lasted for 12 weeks (48 hours) for each class. The three groups received treatment in speaking in two two-hour sessions in a week program. The materials for the course remained constant for the three groups throughout the program. The only difference was the strategies used for the assigned tasks and activities. Participants of IWG were asked to do the tasks individually. The participants of PWG worked in pairs, and those of TWG were divided into four-member teams and worked in groups. At the end of the treatment, the participants took part in an oral interview, which had been administered in the pre-test, to determine whether any change in speaking fluency had occurred. The results showed that the three groups performed significantly different on the post-test. PWG and TWG outperformed IWG, indicating that the techniques of working in pairs and teams promote the speaking fluency of the Iranian EFL learners.

Key words: Individual work; Pair work; Team work; Speaking fluency.

INTRODUCTION

The students’ communicative ability in English is one of the long term goals that language teachers would like to achieve in class. According to Bygate (1987), the problems teachers face in teaching a foreign language or a second language is in getting the students to use the language and it is indeed a difficult task for language teachers to provide sufficient inputs for students to be competent enough to speak the language well. Usually, students feel insecure about their language competence especially in English and face problems of communicating and expressing their thoughts due to the fear of making mistakes that makes them a silent participant in speech sessions.

A number of teaching techniques and activities are used by teachers to help his/her learners improve their language skills especially their fluency in speaking. Some courses may require the teacher to emphasize one skill more than the others. This emphasis may arise from the needs of the learners and the course context in general. Regardless of the focused skill, various factors may affect the teaching technique used.

From another point of view, the usage of different language teaching techniques in the classroom can be viewed from different aspects, one of which is the roles of both teacher and learner. Traditionally, language teaching methods were teacher-fronted and teacher was the authority [or authoritative and authoritarian, to use Widdowson's term (1990)] in class. Rogers and Freiberg (1994, as cited in Clifton, 2006, p. 142) state that "...the teacher-controlled classroom has always had its critics inter alia those who are calling for the 'reinvention' of the teacher as the facilitator". Stevick (1998) and Underhill (1999) elaborated on the notion of facilitator and mentioned that "[f]acilitator can be described as an instructor who empowers his or her learners and gives them more initiative and responsibility" (cited in Clifton, 2006 p. 142). The 'initiatives and responsibilities' both inside and outside the classroom may be the way learners perform tasks and activities.
Collaborative learning refers to an instruction method in which learners at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The learners are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one learner helps other students to be successful (Srinivas, H., 2011). As a result of recent changes made in teaching methods and techniques, individual, pair and team work are considered as main strategies in most EFL/ESL learning situations, especially when communicative, learner centered (learner based) and/or content of task based syllabuses are used. As Pica (2000, p. 1) puts it, "[t]he field of English language is in transition, as it seeks new approaches, and re-examines older ones in order to address the range and level of English proficiency required for participation in today's global community".

Collaborative/Cooperative (pair and team work) and individual language learning are familiar to almost all TEFL/TESL researchers, and they have been emphasized by different methodologists, applied linguists, and syllabus designers (Widdowson, 1990; Harmer, 2001; Freeman, 2003; Brown, 2001; Ellis, 2004 among others). Collaborative learning refers to an instruction method in which learners at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The learners are responsible for one another’s learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one learner helps other students to be successful (Srinivas, H., 2011).

Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves. It is through the talk that learning occurs. In a collaborative learning setting, learners have the opportunity to converse with peers, present and defend ideas, exchange diverse beliefs, question other conceptual frameworks, and are actively engaged (Srinivas, H., 2011). To what extent, why, and how these teaching techniques can affect learners’ speaking in general and speaking fluency in particular and which of them can be more positively effective on learners’ speaking fluency are the main concerns of the present study.

The Present Study

Speaking fluently is one of the major concerns of Iranian students who are learning English. Although they may be interested in improving their writing, listening, reading, and vocabulary (which this study does not cover), their main preoccupation is to speak English fluently. Speaking fluently includes no hesitancy in speaking as well as no fear of English communication. Learners may try to use what they have learnt with their classmates, teachers or native English speakers for various purposes. However, in regard to oral communication and particularly speaking fluency, majority of them have great difficulty in doing so. Consequently, talking freely and fluently is a dream for almost all EFL learners attending conversation classes. Being exposed to films and TV and radio programs, in which native speakers participate, can be an excellent tool for promoting speaking fluency.

To become adept, learners must have the opportunity to speak and make use of the skills they have been taught. Students, with limited practice, exhibit less fluency in English as compared to those who have had opportunities to use their skills both inside and outside the classroom. One of the problems of EFL classes in Iran may be that learners are not given enough time on task. Currently the researchers are working on grouping-related issues which are very much at the heart of the affective dimension of L2 learning.

In line with this kind of thinking, Stevick (1980, p. 4, as cited in Dornyei & Malderez, 1997, p. 67) maintains that "success depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom".

Leaving through the recent studies, one may encounter studies by different scholars on individual work, pair work, and team work (Brown, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Johnson, Johnson & Stanne, 2000; Liang & Mohan, 2003; Siegel, 2005; Yahya & Huie, 2002 among others). There are also other studies on teaching speaking and speaking fluency. However, there is the serious absence of studies that examine the quality and the types of EFL learners grouping used- specifically- in relation to speaking fluency (Breshnihan & Stoops, 1996; Brown & Nation, 1997; Chambers, 1997; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Nikolov & Krashen, 1997; Skehan, 1996). Some other scholars have studied learners grouping on other skills such as writing (Frazier, 2007; Hyland, 2000; Storch, 1999, 2005; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998; Youngs & Green, 2001).

As two famous scholars (Johnson & Johnson, 1994) in the field of competitive and cooperative learning have stressed, the way learners are structured to interact with one another is the neglected aspect of language teaching.
Additionally, the researchers at present have noticed a lack of attention towards promoting oral fluency in Iranian EFL teaching contexts. Therefore, the present study centers on investigating the relationship between the effectiveness of EFL learners grouping and their oral fluency for which studies show that there is still room for investigation.

This study may guide EFL instructors to improve their learners' speaking proficiency in general and speaking fluency in particular and arrive at the importance of different learners grouping (individual, pair, or team work) in the class. Moreover, it may prove the pedagogical value of learners grouping in EFL classroom and guide EFL instructors to make greater use of cooperative learning (pair and/or team work) and/or individual practice in their teaching techniques and activities in order to promote their learners’ speaking proficiency. Generally, problems faced by EFL learners in real life situations stem from the instructional strategy used in the tasks, exercises, and assignments given in the educational context. The problems can be reduced by learner-grouping (individual, pair and teamwork), which is in fact the subject of this study.

**Research Questions**

The main questions to be pursued in the present study were as follows:
1) Does individual work improve Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency?
2) Does pair work improve Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency?
3) Does team work improve Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency?

**IV. Methodology**

**A. Setting**

The present study was carried out at one of the branches of Ayandehsazan Language Center located in Khorramshahr, Iran, during the summer of 2011-2012.

**B. Participants**

Participants in this study were 75 female English language learners studying at Khorramshahr Ayandehsazan Language Center. They were selected from a population of one hundred and fifty four. For the purpose of research, they were divided into three groups of twenty five. The average age of the selected participants was 19. The present study included only females, since the language center in which the study was conducted is a female language institute.

The participants were high school students, university freshmen and sophomores, and some young housewives, some of whom were university graduates. All of the participants had studied English at least for 8 months in the above mentioned language center.

**C. Instruments**

The first instrument in this study was a test consisting of the objective placement test with 70 multiple choice items with one point for each item and oral interview of Interchange/Passages Placement Testing Program (Lesley, Hansen & Faust, 2003) which had 30 points and both put together totaled to 100 points.

The objective placement test (Appendix A) included three sections: Listening (20 items), Reading (20 items) and Language Use (30 items). The participants were allowed 50 minutes to finish this part of the test.

The oral placement test included an interview (for sample and questions used, see Appendix B). The checklist developed by Askari (2006) was used to score each of the interviews, which includes six scales including fluency, comprehension, communication, vocabulary, structure, and accent. Each scale incorporates five levels (5 points) as demonstrated in appendix C. The level of each scale was also defined by Askari (2006) and is given in Appendix D. The validity of the checklist was also verified (see Askari, 2006). In order to verify the validity of his newly designed checklist, Askari conducted a pilot study where in ten students were randomly selected and then rated using both his new checklist and the one designed by Hughes (2003, p. 139) respectively to determine the criterion-related validity of the new checklist. By applying Pearson correlation coefficient formula to the obtained scores the validity of the newly formed checklist was determined. The figure obtained (.968) from the calculations showed a high positive correlation between the two series of scores which proved the validity of the new checklist.

The textbook used was Interchange, level (1) by Richards (2005) which includes many exercises although some of them were not specifically designed for speaking. Though all the exercises have been used during the course, learners’ grouping (individual, pair, and team work) was focused upon while using the exercises specifically designed for that purpose. The rest of the sections and exercises were used for practicing conversation. Topics and stories were selected from Talk Your Head Off by West and West (1997) and Anecdotes in American English (Hill, 1980) which were the additional materials. The audio CDs of both the Interchange’s (1) and Anecdotes in American English were used and so the CD player and TV/monitor were the other instruments that were incorporated. Apart from these, two MP3 recorders were also used to record the participant’s voices.
D. Data Procedure

Pilot study
To make sure about the reliabilities of the written and oral exams of Interchange//Passages Placement Testing Program (Lesley et al., 2003), these tests were administered to 30 female language learners with characteristics similar to those of target group. Then, the learners were interviewed and scored by two colleagues. The scorings were based on the validated checklist for scoring oral production of EFL learners by Askari (2006). Then, the reliability of both the objective placement test and the oral interview were calculated separately by means of KR-21 formula. The reliability of the objective placement test and interview were calculated as .812 and .785 respectively.

The Proficiency test and participants’ homogeneity
Once the reliability of the proficiency test was verified, it was carried out on one hundred and fifty four female EFL learners from Ayandehsazan Language Center in order to ensure that there were no significant differences between them. The participants eligible for the elementary level were selected after they were graded (70 points for the written and 30 for the interview). The procedure was as follows:
To select the homogeneous participants, the researchers conducted a sample Interchange/Passages Placement Testing Program (Lesley et al., 2003) to determine the proficiency level of language learners where the participants attempted the written and oral exam of the selected placement test. Based on the placement instructions (see Lesley et al., 2003), administration of the necessary statistical calculations and the generalizations of the researchers, the ones who scored between 16.42 and 33.57 out of 100 in the proficiency tests were considered appropriate for the research study and seventy five participants who scored within this range were selected as elementary learners.

The reason for choosing elementary as the intended level to be studied is the general belief that oral fluency should start at the early stages of language acquisition. As Derwing et al. (2007, p. 2) put forth, "fluency problems can also be exasperating for L2 speakers; it is thus important for L2 learners to develop oral fluency skills early in L2 acquisition".

In order to account for inter-rater and intra-rater reliability, the two other TEFL university instructors who were non-native collaborated in the study. So both evaluators were present in the interview session, carefully listened to the participants and marked them using the approved scale. In order to account for the intra-rater reliability, the evaluators marked the participants once during the interview and once again while listening to the recorded voices of the interviewees. Then, each of the inter-raters gave two scores to each participant (one score during the interview and one while listening to the recorded voices of the participants). In other words each participant was marked four times and the mean score was the final score of each participant.

Pre-test scores
The 5 level fluency scores of all of the 75 participants were retained as the pre-test scores to be compared with their final fluency scores at the end of the semester as the post-test scores. The interviews were scored according to the checklist developed by Askari (2006).

The treatment and participants’ grouping
The 75 participants divided into three groups: Individual Work group (IWG), Pair Work Group (PWG) and Team Work Group (TWG) out of which the PWG and TWG were considered to be the cooperative/collaborative learning groups of this study.
The participants were assigned into pairs in PWG and grouped into teams of four in TWG randomly at first. However, Johnson and Johnson (1999 as cited in Wang and Lin, 2007, p. 2257) believe that there are two ways for assigning students to groups and pairs: student-selected and teacher-selected. They state that: "...student-selected group composition is often too homogenous with high achievers with other high achievers, minority students with other minority students, and males with other males". They went on to elaborate on the following:
[Teacher-selected groups often result in the best mix because teachers are better able than students to form optimal combinations. In addition, many cooperative learning methods recommend heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous, group composition in order to reflect varying student abilities and backgrounds in the class. Research further suggests that heterogeneous groups exhibit greater degrees of elaborative thinking, providing and receiving explanations, and perspective taking in discussion material; these in turn lead to deeper understanding, better reasoning abilities, and accuracy in long-term retention (cited in Wang and Lin, 2007, p. 2257).
The above mentioned issues were also taken into consideration and so some participants’ movements from one team or pair to another one were done based on:
(a) The instructor’s expediency according to the participants’ ability, (b) the prior familiarity with the participants of this study and (c) consultation with the participants’ other teachers. Information, both general and specific, regarding the abilities of the participants was collected in this way.

The participants’ own team selection and interest. It should be noted that the movements of the participants from team or pair to another team or pair were controlled and limited as mentioned in part (1) in order to prevent forming high and/or low ability pairs and teams.

An attempt was made to have “ability heterogeneous” pairs of PWG and teams of TWG although the participants of PWG and TWG were homogeneous since they had been selected using the sample placement test. Homogenous pairs and teams can be disadvantageous to pair work and team work in PWG and TWG as it may lead the researcher to form high and low ability pairs and teams. In order to prevent the above, the participants’ abilities and interests were also taken into consideration.

This was accounted for through the mean score of the groups and although all the participants (75) were homogeneous, the test scores did vary. The participants did- and could- not score the same in the test. The mean score did not represent the individual participants’ scores either.

The semester lasted for 12 weeks (48 hours) for each class. During each week, each group met for two sessions, each of which lasted two hours. The instructor provided the groups with the same kind of materials stated in the instrument section, where the difference was in the procedure they followed to work on the assigned tasks and activities both inside and outside the classroom.

When the instructions were given in the class, the participants of IWG were asked to do the assigned tasks and activities individually and no pair or team work was required. They only interacted with the instructor who provided them with as much help as they needed during the course. The other main strategy which was utilized by the learners of IWG was doing private speech, since no pair or team work was emphasized and allowed. Each session was spent with the individualized task performance during which they recited and talked about the conversations, reproduced stories from the course book and elaborated on the questions raised about the topics of the book Talk Your Head Off.

The participants of PWG were divided into pairs and worked on all tasks, activities and assignments in pairs. Therefore, this class consisted of 12 pairs and an individual participant who paired with one of the members of the other pairs in order to practice the given task. They role-played the conversations of Interchange and practiced the other parts in pairs. The stories of Anecdotes in American English were modified so that they could work on them in pairs. Based on the story, they chose to either make dialogues or narrate some parts and role play the other parts. The paired talks attempted to be carried out only in English except for any unexpected problem which might occur. Here, the instructor, as a facilitator, provided help and let them do independent work. Some of the problems they encountered were: (a) translation of some parts, (b) explanation of the role-play process. The participants of PWG also shared a feeling of competition and cooperation and depending on the kind of activity they were assigned, they took the appropriate strategy (competition or cooperation).

The participants of TWG were divided into five teams of 4 and one team of 5 from the first session of the class and worked on all tasks, activities, and assignments together. The teams discussed, role played, and made modifications to the Interchange units. They held discussion teams for the topic of the book Talk your Head Off. Additionally, they modified the stories of Anecdotes in American English so that each team member was responsible for a specific task. The materials for the course remained constant for the three groups throughout the semester.

Post-test scores

Finally, the three groups took the oral interview of the Interchange/Passages Placement Testing Program (Lesley et al., 2003), which was the same for the three groups and nearly similar to the test given in the pre-test stage both in content and form. This test included some questions related to the materials and the topics which all groups worked on either individually or in pairs or in teams of four throughout the sessions. Then, the fluency scores in the post-test were compared with those obtained in the pre-test. To the learners’ speaking ability in general and their speaking fluency in particular, the researchers used Askari’s (2006) scale, based on which the components of learners’ speaking proficiency were rated and then the scores of fluency were treated separately for the purpose of this study.

Again, in order to account for inter-rater and intra-rater reliability, the two TEFL university instructors mentioned earlier attended some sessions of the three classes in order to control the stress variable of the participants in the interview session. They carefully listened to the participants and scored them using the approved scale. To account for the intra-rater reliability, raters followed the same procedure that they utilized in the first interview on the placement exam, on which the pre test scores of the 75 participants were also obtained. They scored the participants once during the interview and once again while listening to the recorded voices of the interviewees. Then, each of them gave two scores to each participant (one score during the interview and the other score while listening to the recorded voices of the participants). The mean score of each
interviewee by one rater was calculated and it was added to the mean of the other rater and the average was the final score for each participant.

V. Data Analysis
For the purpose of analyzing the statistics of the present study, first, the descriptive statistics of pre- and post-test scores of each group were calculated (see Appendix E). Then, a one-way ANOVA was administered in order to see if there is any significant difference among the three groups. After comparing the observed F with the critical F value, a post hoc test (Tukey HSD) illustrated the exact locations of the significant treatments. Furthermore, the paired sample t-test was administered in order to find the difference between pre- and post-test scores of the three groups.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the three groups
Since the present study is trying to investigate the effect of individual, pair, and team work on EFL learners' speaking fluency, the performance of the participants of each group on each variable was taken into consideration. Therefore, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether the observed F was significant at .05 level. The results of a one-way ANOVA are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3.368</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>13.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>9.309</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12.677</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the observed F (13.026) with the critical F (a ratio between 3.11 and 3.13 at the level of .05), the researchers could claim that there were meaningful differences among the three groups which could be attributed to the treatment of the present study (Individual Work, Pair Work, and Team Work). As Table (1) also shows, the significance level is smaller than .05 and .01.

Post hoc test (Tukey HSD): location of difference
The groups were different in the way of working individually, in pairs, and in teams, but an important point was to find out where the difference lay. This was investigated by conducting a post hoc test. To this end, a Tukey HSD test served the purpose. The groups were compared two by two and the results are given in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I)Groups</th>
<th>(J)Groups</th>
<th>Mean Difference (I-J)</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IWG</td>
<td>PWG</td>
<td>-.493280 *</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWG</td>
<td>IWG</td>
<td>.493280 *</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWG</td>
<td>PWG</td>
<td>-.386640 *</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The difference between Individual Work Group and Pair Work Group was significant. Since the mean difference was negative (-.493280), it can be concluded that the average mean of PWG was greater than the mean in IWG. That implies the dominancy of PWG results over IWG.

Consequently, the results showed that participants who worked in pairs outperformed the participants who worked individually. For the same reason (the greatness of the mean of PWG in comparison with the mean of TWG), it was concluded that the participants who worked in pairs, also, did better than the participants who worked in teams.

The above mentioned results support the idea of many scholars who have backed the power and influence of pair work on different language elements (for example Storch, 2002, 2001, and 1999).

Paired samples t-test
In order to get a broader view of the performance of the three groups on their pre and post test scores, paired sample t-test was administered Table 3. Critical t = 2.064 at .05 level of significance.
Results showed no significant increase in the performance of the IWG. This implies that the participants of IWG were not statistically different in their post-test performance. This rejects the idea of the scholars (for example, Ellis, 2004; Harmer, 2001) who have advocated the application of individual work activities in the classroom.

PWG results obtained from t-test showed a very sharp increase in the performance of its participants. The level of significance and the observed t both led the researchers to the idea of emphasizing the results obtained from the work of others who have backed pair work activities in- and outside- the classroom.

The results obtained from TWG marked a gradual increase in the performance of TWG participants in the post-test. Therefore, the result of this pair was also significant. Comparing the critical t with the observed t (2.572) showed that result of pair 3 (TWG) was significant. The results of this group supported team work activities (Oakley et al., 2004; Pica & Doughty, 1996).

Results of the paired t-test brought the researchers up with the idea that the pair work and team work are better activities in promoting EFL learners’ speaking fluency.

Discussion

Based on the data obtained in this research, possible reasons were discussed and elaborated. The research questions mentioned in the introduction chapter will be raised again for further analysis.

The answer to the first research question in the study will be explored through the testing of the first null hypothesis. The first null hypothesis (HO1) was as follows:

\[ H_0 : \text{Individual work has no significant effect on Iranian EFL learners’ speaking fluency.} \]

Based on the data obtained, and regardless of all the probable assumptions concerning IWG which are going to be investigated in this chapter, HO1 is simply verified (t observed = .721 < t critical = 2.0674).

To view the data statistically, the IWG group turned out to have some improvement. The mean of the pre-test scores was 1.37324 and that of the post-test was 1.41332. This demonstrates that there has been some difference between the two means. Yet, this difference (the mean difference) was not statistically significant to let the researchers reject the null hypothesis at the level of .05.

After verifying HO1, the first research question can be answered and scrutinized. Therefore, simply stated, the answer to the first question is “no”. Since individual work has its own advantages as well, some researchers (e.g. Ellis, 2004) have advocated the importance of individual work. Some others (e.g. Storch, 2002) have stressed pair or/and team work. Without a shadow of a doubt, they do not seem to have rejected the use of individual work in or out of the class.

Likewise, although the answer to the first question in this research was negative, the researchers of this study do not strongly claim that individual work has no role in language learning process. Individual work may work better for other language learning elements like reading, writing, listening, and even pronunciation. 'Private speech' (Ellis, 2004), as a strategy, can be suitable for different situations of language learning. Individual work activities may be helpful in one's development of the pronunciation and the other language elements. Accordingly, it must be noted that individual work might have some positive effects on speaking fluency, yet the results of this research did not approve this.

The reason why the participants of IWG did not improve their speaking fluency might be due to some unknown factors. One factor might be that they did not have enough opportunity to have verbal exchange with each other; which means that the learner-learner interactions were not emphasized. However, it must be stated that not focusing on learner-learner interactions was one of the most important features of IWG. It might likely be that if more attention was given to private speech, the participants might demonstrate more improvement in their speaking fluency.

It may also be necessary to mention that there might have been other factors influencing the individual work outcomes. The other possible reason why the participants of individual work group (IWG) did not show any significant improvement can be due to the affective filter which may be built up between two people, either learner-learner or learner-teacher interaction in this study. It must be noted again that there was less- if not any- emphasis on learner-learner interaction. This way, the only kind of interaction which remained was the learner-teacher interaction. This is where there might have been some affective filter, which itself could prevent learners from talking freely. Thus, this could have led them into not having a sense of belonging. It should also be taken into consideration that the instructor put in great effort to create a fear free situation to overcome the affective filter.

The second research hypothesis was as follows:

\[ H_0 : \text{Pair work has no significant effect on Iranian EFL learners’ speaking fluency.} \]

The results from PWG data the participants showed a significant improvement in their speaking fluency.

Statistically, since there has been a significant difference between the two means, HO2 can be simply rejected (t observed = 4.562 > t critical = 2.0674).
Since the results of the pair work group (PWG) seemed to be significant, the answer to the second question would be "yes". Consequently, pair work showed a great improvement in the PWG participants' speaking fluency.

Interestingly, pair work, as has been advocated by some scholars (e.g. Johnson & Johnson, 1998: Storch, 2002), is turned out to be helpful to the elementary EFL learners.

The first reason is that the participants of PWG were paired heterogeneously. As was explained in the procedure part of the methodology chapter, the pairing of the participants of PWG was based on their ability-heterogeneity. Since fluency is acquired naturally and cannot be taught (Chambers, 1997), the improvement of the participants of PWG may be due to the great degree of interaction they had with each other. Therefore, interaction in pair work counts as a facilitator for increasing the level of interactions among learners. The amount of verbal exchange between pairs might be another reason for improvement, because the amount of time on task, quality and the quantity of the exchanged verbal language are crucial elements to help learners improve their language learning. The other reason may be that the participants of PWG had the feeling of competition and cooperation. Depending on the kind of activity they were assigned, they took either strategy (competition or cooperation). Therefore, cooperation and competition among the students could develop autonomy and independence from the teacher. Other factors can be that pair work could build up a relaxing environment and hence reduce the affective filter inside the classroom. The learners of PWG seemed to benefit the time they had with each other. They felt more secure when they made mistakes in front of their peers first. As was seen, in most cases, they managed to do self-correction and peer correction in a satisfactory way.

The instructor was not just interacting with individuals and simply asking them to work in pairs. He interacted with pairs and tried to manage the class in a way to ensure the presupposed quality of the kind of pair work that was being done by participants was achieved. In the situations that the learners were asked to work in pairs, sometimes they did not actually do what they had been asked to and instead talked in their native language about other irrelevant topics. The instructor of this research tried to control such kinds of restrictions by careful pairing and observation.

The third research hypothesis was as follows:

H03: Team work has no significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency.

The results of this group showed a significant improvement in the participants' speaking fluency. Referring to the data related to the results of this group, one can see that the observed t is greater than the critical t (t observed = 2.572 t critical = 2.0674). Thus, at the level of .05, H03 is statistically nullified.

The results obtained from the data analysis and nullification of the third hypothesis provide sufficient evidence to answer the third research question. Team work turned out to have improved the speaking fluency of the participants. Hence, the positive answer to this question guides the stream of the research towards verifying team work. However, it did not demonstrate an improvement comparable to pair work group.

Team work seemed to have had characteristics of its own that some scholars, mentioned in the review of the literature of this research, have strongly emphasized. Interaction as a dominant factor in team work might be regarded as the most important element affecting the results of this group. For that reason, since the participants of TWG had multilateral interactions with each other and the teacher, they came up with more verbal language hence resulting in improving their speaking fluency.

The feeling of security might be another factor affecting the results of TWG. Since the participants of this group were asked to feel free to make any changes to the conversations, stories and the topics by their own words, feeling of joy and enthusiasm were built up which lead them to have a strong feeling of security and belonging. Hence, another element influencing the improvement of speaking fluency of this group might be that they could reduce the affective filter.

They also seemed to develop a sense of responsibility and autonomy. This way, they also had individual accountability in the activities they were working on. By developing a sense of accountability they could feel more relaxed and practice in a stress-free environment.

CONCLUSION

Taking the results of the data analysis and the probable reasons into consideration, one can come up with the illuminating importance of pair work and team work. Meanwhile, individual work should not be undermined. Nevertheless, the results of this research did not give solid grounds to advocate the effectiveness of individual work on promoting Iranian elementary EFL female learners' speaking fluency.

Individual work did not seem to be effective on speaking fluency in this setting, conditions, and with these participants. It could probably count positive in another EFL setting. However, it can be concluded that individual work is not a very significant factor in improving speaking fluency of EFL learners. The results obtained from individual work in this research may not be generalized to any other EFL settings and other language elements.
In sum, pair work and team work can be regarded as two positive strategies in developing speaking fluency of Iranian elementary EFL learners. Nonetheless, the pair work group outperformed the participants of team work group.
The conclusions that can be made are: 1) individual work should not be emphasized while working on speaking fluency in EFL contexts, 2) pair work factor should be highly emphasized where speaking fluency is the focus of study, 3) team work, though was less significant than pair work in this study, should be also utilized as the second significant factor in speaking fluency.

Appendix A

Objective placement test of Interchange/Passages Placement Testing Program

Section 1: Listening
In this section of the test, you will hear conversations and answer some questions about them. For each conversation first read the situation and the question or questions. Then listen to the conversation. Answer the question after you hear the conversation. Respond to the question by marking the correct answer (a, b, c or d) on your answer sheet.
Read the example situation and question.
Example:
Situation: Bill Sanchez calls Dr. Stockton’s office to make an appointment.
Bill is going to see the doctor on ........
 a) Tuesday at 10:00.
b) Tuesday at 4:00.
c) Wednesday at 10:00.
d) Wednesday at 4:00.

Now listen to the example conversation.
[EXAMPLE CONVERSATION]
Now answer the example question.
The answer for the example is d, Wednesday at 4:00. The letter d is filled in on your answer sheet.
Situation 1: David is talking with Tomomi when Monica comes into the room.
1. ........ are meeting for the first time.
a) David and Monica b) David and Tomomi
c) Tomomi and Monica d) David, Monica, and Tomomi
Situation 2: Ken and Nancy are at a restaurant.
2. Ken ........
a) is having steak tonight b) stopped eating steak
c) eats steak a lot d) prefers chicken to steak
Situation 3: Karen calls Jason’s home. Jason’s father answers the telephone.
Karen is going to ........
 a)speak with Jason at work b) call back in an hour
c)wait for Jason to call d) send a written message
Situation 4: A reporter is giving today’s weather forecast.
3. It will be clear in ........
a)the Northeast b)Seattle
c)Boston d)Miami
4. In Seattle, the weather is ........
a)Hot b)snowy
c)Cool d)rainy
Situation 5: Bill invites Jennifer to go to dinner and a movie.
5. They’re going to ........
a)leave work a little early b) go to the movie before dinner
c)see the movie tomorrow d)have dinner at 7:00
6. Jennifer doesn’t accept right away because she can’t ........
a)eat a late lunch b)leave work early
c)go to dinner d)see the movie
Situation 6: Linda is asking Jim about his plans for the summer.
7. In the summer, Jim usually ……
   a) stays in the mountains  b) takes trips with his family
   c) visits his parents  d) goes to the beach
8. This summer he’s planning to ……
   a) stay at home  b) go to the beach
   c) fish with his dad  d) hike in the mountains

12 Situation 7: Phil is talking with Susie about money.
10. Phil is upset because ……
   a) Susie can’t lend him any money  b) his parents won’t give him money
   c) Albert hasn’t returned his money  d) his friends never lend him money
11. Albert ……
   a) didn’t borrow $100  b) isn’t working now
   c) doesn’t need the money  d) can’t return the money yet
12. Susie doesn’t lend money to friends because ……
   a) she has just enough for herself  b) lending money can change a friendship
   c) people won’t lend her money  d) her friends don’t need it

Situation 8: Natalie and Chuck are talking about their experiences abroad.
13. Chuck went backpacking ……
   a) in Brazil  b) by himself
   c) after high school  d) with his father
14. Chuck says he “would have liked to have seen Portugal.” He means that he ……
   a) went there, and he liked it  b) didn’t go there, but he wanted to
   c) went there, but he didn’t like it  d) didn’t go there and he didn’t want to
15. While Natalie was in Japan, she ……
   a) traveled all over the country  b) lived with a Japanese family
   c) learned Japanese quickly  d) got very homesick
16. Chuck doesn’t want to ……
   a) travel anymore  b) learn a foreign language
   c) stay at home  d) live abroad

Situation 9: Diane and Conrad are talking about their careers.
17. Conrad got into advertising because he ……
   a) studied advertising in college  b) heard about a job opening
   c) liked to help people  d) was tired of his old job
18. When he was young, Conrad wanted to ……
   a) work in advertising  b) become a doctor
   c) stay in school  d) go into business
19. Diane’s parents didn’t want her to ……
   a) start her own business  b) finish college
   c) be too successful  d) change her career
20. Conrad ……
   a) owns his own company  b) enjoys working in advertising
   c) thinks his job is boring  d) wants to leave his job

Section 2: Reading

In this section of the Objective Placement Test, you will read some short passages and answer questions about them. Choose the word or words that best complete the sentence. For each item, fill in your answer on the answer sheet. You will have 20 minutes to complete this section.

Passage 1: What are you doing today?
   BETTY CHAN: I usually stay home on Sundays and take it easy—read, clean the house, do stuff like that. But today I’m at the mall. I’m buying something for my kids.
   a) shopping  b) reading  c) cleaning  d) resting
Passage 2: What do you do?
TONY PEREZ: I’m a flight attendant with a major airline. Flying isn’t dangerous, but it can be stressful. When I’m up in the air working, I always have something to do. I like it because I meet a lot of interesting people.
22. Tony’s job is ……
a) busy b) easy c) relaxing d) boring

Passage 3: A vacation postcard
Dear Sal, Greetings from France - it’s so good to be back here again! We left the kids with their grandparents in Chicago, and we’re biking across the French countryside by ourselves. We brought a tent and sleeping bags, so we can camp out if we want to, but we’re really enjoying the small hotels we find along the way. Love, Michael and Paula
23. Michael and Paula ……
a) have been to France before b) took their children with them c) are visiting their grandparents d) prefer to sleep outside

Passage 4: The “zone”
You’re deeply involved in a task and can ignore everything around you – ringing telephones, your neighbor’s TV, even your own hunger – and still do things in record time. This is similar to what athletes call the “zone”: the power to concentrate so hard that you can ignore everything else. This ability can bring success in any field, but in athletics it can mean all the difference between winning and losing a game or event.
24. In this reading, the “zone” refers to a person’s ……
a) state of mind b) neighborhood c) physical condition d) intelligence
25. Athletes in the “zone” are more likely to ……
a) fall b) compete c) win d) relax

Passage 5: Henry Ford and the Model-T
Henry Ford became famous and rich because he found a better, faster way to build cars. This is shown in the history of the Model-T. When the Model-T was first introduced in 1908, it took 14 hours to build and cost $850. After Ford introduced into his own factory the mass-production techniques that he saw in a meat-packing plant, the time for building a model-T was reduced to less than two hours. As a result, Ford was able to drop the price of the car to $265. By 1927, he had sold over 15 million Model-Ts.
26. The first Model-T was expensive because it ……
a) was new b) very popular c) took a long time to build d) was built in a factory
27. The Model-T became so popular because it was …… than other cars.
a) newer b) faster c) better d) cheaper

Passage 6: It’s a big country!
When it comes to body weight, Americans stand out. Most visitors to the United States, no matter where they go across this vast country, comment on the size of Americans. In fact, these impressions are backed by numerous statistics. For example, the average 5’4” American weighs 162 pounds or 15 pounds more than the average person of the same height from Western or Central Europe. Another comparison: At 150 pounds, the average 5’4” American woman is 24 pounds heavier than her Japanese counterpart.
Why are Americans so heavy? Some blame the American diet. Certainly it’s true that Americans eat more high-fat food – meat, dairy products, and processed food – and fewer grains and vegetables than people in other countries. But fat isn’t the whole story. Life style factors – including the tendency for Americans to drive rather than walk or ride a bicycle to work, to snack throughout the day, and to have so many labor-saving devices in the home – appear to contribute to the problem.
28. According to the article, visitors to the United States often comment on the size of the ……
a) population b) cities c) country d) people
29. According to the article, the average Western European weighs ……
a) more than an American b) more than a Central European c) less than an American d) less than a Japanese person
30. In comparison with Americans, people in other countries eat more ……
a) meat b) dairy products c) processed food d) grains
31. The article implies that American would lose weight if they ……
a) snacked more often b) rode bicycles to work
c) stayed at home more d) ate fewer vegetables

**Passage 7: Small talk isn’t so “small”**

Small talk may not be about serious issues; nevertheless, researchers into the subject have concluded that it’s important. That’s because small talk keeps us connected to one another and can lead to bigger things, such as a job or a new friendship. Yet people who find themselves alone with another person often don’t know what to say. Here are a few tips to help you start a conversation, and keep the conversational ball rolling:

Start with the obvious. If you have something in common with another person (your job, hobbies, a person you both know, etc.), begin with that. If you don’t know the person, it’s always acceptable to bring up a neutral topic such as the weather or a recent news event. It isn’t necessary to be clever – all that’s required is to show interest in the other person and to be willing to talk.

Compliment where appropriate. If the other person has done something you like or is wearing something attractive, it’s always appropriate to compliment. But avoid talking about the specifics of a person’s physical appearance (people can’t usually change how they look) and keep your compliments short and to the point (“What a great tie!” or “You look great tonight!”) and continue with another topic.

Talk about yourself then return to your partner. It’s perfectly OK to talk about your own interests for a while, but keep your conversation from becoming a monolog. It’s only polite, for example, that after talking about your own children, you turn the conversation back to your partner by asking about his or her children.

32. According to the article, the main function of small talk is to ……
   a) show our own importance b) get valuable information
   c) relate to other people d) talk about major issues

14 33. “Start with the obvious” means that you should talk about things that you …….
   a) have in common b) enjoy doing c) want to understand d) know everything about

34. You need to be careful when complimenting someone because most people …….
   a) don’t like compliments b) can’t change how they look
   c) don’t dress very well d) haven’t done anything interesting

35. You should avoid monologs because other people …….
   a) have to interest in what you say b) already know a lot about you
   c) like to talk about themselves, too d) prefer to discuss neutral subjects

**Passage 8: Headaches**

Everyone has experienced headaches, but only recently have medical researchers begun to learn more specifically about the causes and possible treatments for different types of headaches pain.

The most common type of headaches is the simple tension headache. Tension headaches are usually mild and short-lasting and can result from various factors, such as stress caused by worry or noise. Tension headaches are caused by a tightening of the neck or back muscles, which slows the flow of blood and therefore, oxygen to the brain. It is the lack of oxygen that causes the pain. Taking a mild analgesic such as aspirin can relieve most headaches. Analgesics expand the blood vessels and restore the normal flow of blood and oxygen to the brain.

A more serious type of headache is the migraine. Migraine headaches are often extremely painful and can last for hours or days. Like tension headaches they can be the result of different factors, including stress, hormonal changes, and allergies. Unlike tension headaches, however, they are caused by an abnormal expansion or swelling (rather than a contraction) of the blood vessels within the head. Medicines to that shrink swollen blood vessels can be used to treat migraine headaches.

A tiny minority of headaches can be linked to severe physical problems such as head injury or brain tumors. For these types of headaches there are medicines to treat the symptoms, but there is no cure unless the underlying problem is removed.

36. This article discusses the ……
   a) tiny minority of people who have headaches b) history of medical research into headaches
   c) causes and remedies for headaches d) physical problems caused by headaches

37. A tension headache can result when ……
   a) the neck and back muscles relax b) people get injured in an accident
   c) the flow of blood is restricted d) too much oxygen goes to the brain

38. Migraine headaches ……
   a) are the most common kind of headache b) usually last only a few minutes
   c) can cause extreme pain d) have one main cause

39. Medicines for migraines ……
a) relax the head and neck  b) generally relieve tension  
c) increase the flow of blood  d) cause blood vessels to contract  
40. Headaches caused by serious physical problems ......

a) can’t be treated  b) don’t cause much pain  c) have no symptoms  d) are not very common

Section 3: Language Use

In this section, you will answer questions about the use of English. Choose the word or words that best complete the sentence. For each item, fill in your answer on the answer sheet. You will have 15 minutes to complete this section.

41. ...... several good restaurants in our neighborhood.
a) There  b) They’re  c) There are  d) Their

42. The gas station is ...... Main Street.
a) on  b) at  c) next  d) close

43. A: “I can’t swim very well" B: “I can’t ...... ."  
a) too  b) either  c) so  d) neither

44. I enjoy ...... out two or three times a week.  
a) to eat  b) eating  c) eat  d) I eat

45. These days, ...... women keep working after they get married.  
a) most  b) most of  c) almost  d) the most

46. My new job is very ...... .
a) excitement  b) excited  c) exciting  d) excite

47. After finishing college, I hope ...... married.  
a) get b) that get c) getting d) to get

48. Mt. Everest is ...... mountain in the world.  
a) the high  b) high as  c) higher than  d) the highest

15 49. Bob’s never been bungee jumping, ...... he?
a) is  b) has  c) does  d) was

50. I’ve run out of money. I wish I ...... more.  
a) am saving  b) have saved  c) had saved  d) will save

51. Could you tell me where ...... ?  
a) is the post office  b) the post office is  c) it the post office  d) it is the post office

52. If I had known about the accident, I ...... it to the police.  
a) reported  b) would have reported  c) was reporting  d) have been reporting

53. Yolanda ...... part time for several years now.  
a) has been working  b) is working  c) works  d) was working

54. The TajMahal is really worth ...... .  
a) to see it b) seeing c) you see it d) see

55. If I went to live in a foreign country, ...... my friends.  
a) I’d miss b) I’m missing c) I missed d) I miss

56. Would you mind ...... the window?  
a) open b) opening c) to open d) I open

57. I was interested ...... the violin.  
a) to study b) study c) in studying d) studied

58. Before a film is finished, it needs ...... .  
a) they edit it b) to edit c) to be edited d) being edited

59. By 2020, scientists ...... a cure for cancer.  
a) had found b) will have found c) are finding d) have been finding

60. A: “What happened to Kate?” B: “She must ...... about our appointment.”  
a) forget b) be forgetting c) forgot d) have forgotten

61. We’re not used ...... our own meals.  
a) cook b) to cook c) cooking d) to cooking

62. Chicago, ...... is nicknamed the Windy City, is the largest city in Illinois.  
a) it b) which c) what d) that

63. ...... John, I like to cook.  
a) Unless b) Except c) Instead d) Unlike

64. Before ...... breakfast, I usually take a shower.  
a) eat b) to eat c) eating d) that eat

65. I’m taking a class ...... learn more about my computer.  
a) so that b) in order c) in order to d) that
66. For me, mathematics is ...... difficult than biology.
a) more b) the more c) most d) the most
67. I would rather ...... evening classes.
a) don’t take b) not take c) no taking d) not taking
68. I feel sick. I shouldn’t ...... so much.
a) to eat b) eaten c) have eaten d) eating
69. Jim’s boss demanded that he ...... to work earlier.
a) has come b) coming c) is come d) come
70. The earlier children learn to read .......... for their education.
a) good b) the good c) the better d) the best

Appendix B

Oral interview sample of Interchange/Passages Placement Testing Program

Greeting, introductions
Hello. How are you? My name is........
I am a teacher here. What is your name?

Talk about self
Tell me a little about yourself. Where do you live?
How many languages do you speak?

Talk about family
Do you have any brothers and sisters? How many brothers and sister do you have?

Talk about likes and dislikes
Do you like movies (TV/music. etc.)?
What movies (TV programs/music. etc.) do you like?
What is you favorite movie (TV program/ type of music .etc.)?
Do you go to the movies on weekends?

Talk about daily schedule
What time do you get up?
When do you come to school?
What do you every day?
What do you do in your free time?

Talk about or describe home
Do you live in a house or on apartment?
What is it like?
How many bed rooms does it have?

Talk about preferences
Which do you like better,........or......... (e.g., hamburgers or cheeseburgers/hard rock or jazz)?
What kind of........ (e.g., food/music) do you prefer?
Why do you prefer....... (Like........better?)

Talk about places
What other city/country do you know?
What is the city/country like?
What is the weather like there?
Is it hotter or colder than here?

Talk about the past
Where did you grow up?
Did you study English in elementary school/junior high school/high school?
What other languages did you study?
What was your favorite subject?

Give advice
What advice would you give to tourists visiting your country/city?
Where should they go?  
What should they be careful of?  

**Talk about leisure-time activities**  
Do you like to play sports?  
What sports do you like/watch?  
Do you enjoy watching TV?  

**Talk about travel**  
Have you ever been to.......?  
How many times have you been there?  
When did you go there last?  
Where else have you traveled?  

**Compare situations**  
Compare your life today with your life a few years ago. How has it changed?  
How would you like it to be different in the future?  

**Talk about problems, Solutions**  
What do you think is the biggest problem in the world today?  
What could be done to fix it?  
What would you do if you were responsible for fixing it?  

**Talk about hypothetical situations in the past**  
If you hadn't decided to study English, what other language would you have studied?  
If you could have gone to another school, where would you have gone?  

**Speculate about the future**  
What do you think you will be doing a year from now?  
If there anything else you might be doing?  
When are you going to finish your studies?  

**Regrets about the past**  
If you could change one thing about the past, what would it be?  
What do you think should have been done to avoid this?  
Is there anything else that ought to have been done?  

**Hopes and dreams**  
If you could have any job in the world what would it be?  
What would you need to do to make this dream come true?  

17Appendix C  
**Hayati and Askari’s (2008) sample checklist for measuring oral proficiency**  

**Scale I- Fluency:**  
Speaks fluently.  
Speaks with near-native like fluency, pauses and hesitations do not interfere with comprehension  
Speaks with occasional hesitations.  
Speaks hesitantly and slowly because of rephrasing and searching for words.  
Speaks in single word and short patterns, unable to make connected sentences.  

**Scale II- Comprehension**  
Understands academic discourse without difficulty.  
Understands most spoken language except for very colloquial speech.  
Understands academic discourse with repetitions, rephrasing, and clarification.  
Understands simple sentences, words; requires repetitions, slower than normal speech.  
Understands very little or no English.  

**Scale III- Communication**  
Communicates competently in social academic settings.  
Speaks fluently in a social academic settings, errors do not interfere with meaning.
Initiates and sustains conversation, exhibits self confidence in social situations. Begins to communicate for personal and survival needs. Almost unable to communicate.

**Scale IV- Vocabulary**
- Uses extensive vocabulary in any domain appropriately.
- Uses varied vocabulary to discuss general topics and in special interests.
- Uses academic vocabulary, some word usage inappropriate, slightly damages the message.
- Uses limited vocabulary, constant use of one word.
- Inadequate basic vocabulary.

**Scale V- Structure**
- Masters a variety of grammatical structures, almost no error.
- Occasional grammatical errors but no problem with understanding.
- Uses some complex sentences but lacks control over irregular forms.
- Uses predominantly present tense verbs, constant errors interfere with understanding.
- Severe errors make understanding completely impossible.

**Scale VI- Accent**
- Acceptable pronunciation, with few traces of foreign accent.
- Speaks with few phonemic errors, but almost intelligible pronunciation.
- Occasional errors necessitate attentive listening.
- Constant phonemic errors make understanding extremely hard.
- Severe problems make understanding almost impossible.

Extracted from: Farhady et al (2001), Hughes (2003), and Harris (1986).

The descriptive statistics of the three groups Descriptive Statistics of Pair Work Group

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The descriptive statistics of Individual Work Group

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Seyed Hossein Hosseini
- was born in 1982, got his MA in TEFL in Iran in 2008 and did his Cambridge CELTA in Prague, Czech Republic in 2011. He has been teaching English for around 10 years and is currently an EFL instructor at Islamic Azad University, Khorramshahr Branch. He is perusing a PhD program at the University of Waikato in New Zealand.

Morteza Bakhtiarvand
- was born on the 23th of December in 1981. He completed his Bachelor Degree in ELT in Islamic Azad University, Dezful Branch, Iran and further finished her Master Degree of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Islamic Azad University, Research and Sciences Branch, Iran. He has published many papers in the field of ELT in different International Journals such as RELC Journal, Researcher, The International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World, World Journal of English Language. His main areas of interest include TESOL, TEFL, and English Methodology.

Soudabeh Sadat Tabatabaei
- was born in 1982 in Iran. She finished her MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch, Iran in 2008. She is currently a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics in the University of Mysore, India. Her main areas of interest include language teaching and testing, dynamic assessment, sociolinguistics and pragmatics.

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