

**IN THE NAME OF GOD**

**The compassionate**

**The merciful**



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Faculty of Humanities  
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**The Impact of Pushed Output on Oral Proficiency of Iranian EFL Learners**

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## **Dedications**

*To God, The Merciful, I dedicate this humble work.*

*To my parents who were very enthusiastic, proud and supporting through my studying*

*To my wife, for her patience in the difficult situations and for her encouragement.*

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## **Abstract**

### **The Impact of Pushed Output on Oral Proficiency of Iranian EFL Learners**

The notion of Pushed Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) states that language production is facilitative of second language. This hypothesis proposes that when the learners are pushed to engage in production, they have the chance to deliver the messages which are precise, coherent and appropriate. Due to lack of quantitative investigations that either support or refute pushed output, the current study attempted to establish baseline quantitative data on the impacts of pushed output. The purpose of this study was twofold: First, it was intended to explore the impact of pushed output on oral proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Second, it was meant to examine this variable on two components of oral proficiency (i.e. accuracy and fluency). To achieve this purpose, 30 female EFL learners were selected from a whole population pool of 50 based on standard test of IELTS interview and were assigned into an experimental group and control group using a random assignment procedure. The participants in the experimental group received pushed output treatment while the students in the control group received non-pushed output treatment. The data were collected through IELTS interview for measuring oral proficiency in both pre-test and post-test. Then, the interview of each participant was separately tape-recorded and later transcribed and coded to measure accuracy and fluency. The data were statistically analyzed. The statistical results reveal that the experimental group outperformed the control group in oral proficiency and accuracy ( $p < 0.05$ ). The positive impact of pushed output demonstrated in this study is consistent with the hypothesized function of pushed output in SLA. Also, findings have substantiated that pushed output has no impact on fluency; interestingly, non-pushed output enhances participants' fluency, but not significantly enough to consider it as a major finding. Generally, it is implied that the most effective way for developing oral

proficiency, based on the literature and the findings obtained from this research, is pushed output. Additionally, the results can provide some useful insights into syllabus design and English language teaching.

***Key words:*** pushed output, oral proficiency, accuracy, fluency, EFL learners

## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>COH</b>	<b>Comprehensible Output Hypothesis</b>
<b>EFL</b>	<b>English Foreign Language</b>
<b>FL</b>	<b>Foreign Language</b>
<b>IELTS</b>	<b>International English Language Testing Service</b>
<b>IL</b>	<b>Interlanguage</b>
<b>L2</b>	<b>Second Language</b>
<b>NS</b>	<b>Native Speaker</b>
<b>NNS</b>	<b>Non-Native Speakers</b>
<b>PO</b>	<b>Pushed Output</b>
<b>POH</b>	<b>Pushed Output Hypothesis</b>
<b>SLA</b>	<b>Second Language Acquisition</b>
<b>SLL</b>	<b>Second Language Learner</b>

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## 1.1. Introduction

Although English language is not the native language of all human being, it has turned out to be the international language of the world. After the Second World War, the economic and cultural influence of British Empire paved the way for the use of English language in different countries in the world. Also, due to advancement in technology and science in the United States, people in Africa, India, and Asia were pushed to try learning English language. Crystal believed “English is now the dominant or official language in over 60 countries and is represented in every continent” (Crystal, 1997, p.106).

Up to present, all scholars in the field of applied linguistics have been encouraged to study how second language learners (SLLs) can acquire oral proficiency. The demand for oral proficiency in English has been sharply increasing because of strong situation of English as a language for international communication. Ronnerdahl and Johanson (2005, p. 11) has simply stated that “it has been suggested as much as %99 of all communication is spoken”. This statement shows the importance of learning English for all who work in the field of language teaching. The ability to speak English fluently opens up wider opportunities to achieve success in life. Crystal (1997) declares that English is considered as the working language in %85 of International Corporation and is considered as the prime gate to achieve a better occupation.

During the last few decades, study on second language acquisition (SLA) has included a proliferation of investigations that show the effectiveness of treatments in second or foreign language classroom to enhance learners’ language production. In search for the best possible way to teach language production (both spoken and written), the roles of Krashen’s Comprehensible Input (1985), Swain’s Comprehensible Output (1995) and finally Long’s Interaction Hypothesis

(1996) have received substantial attention in SLA theory and a large number of studies have been inspired by them to create major insight in the field of SLA.

In 1970, the language teaching instruction was firmly grounded in comprehension approach. The proponents of this approach recommended that oral production might not be encouraged until the students had receptive experience. In the mean time, studies in situations where students had large amount of comprehensible input revealed that input alone was not sufficient for SLA like students in Canadian French immersion schools. So scholars and researchers began to recognize the role of Pushed Output (PO) as an essential factor for the enhancement of oral proficiency. This study aims to provide additional support required for PO to be encouraged and finally incorporate into teaching techniques within the English Foreign Language (EFL) context.

This chapter will briefly establish theoretical background of study, introduce the questions to be examined, preview the methodology used to conduct the investigations and clarifying the significance of study.

## **1.2. Background of the Study**

English has attained increasing importance throughout the world in general and in Iran in particular. Hence, Iranian parents and instructors have paid too much heed on children's low level of English proficiency and have made effort to find a solution for this issue. Iranian English students have single problems in their study of English. They do not have any communication with native English speakers and also their educational contexts do not have high proportion of English native or near-native speaking teachers. Therefore, English language is considered foreign to many Iranian pupils.



Many studies in SLA have been carried out to investigate how input and output contribute to language learning development. The results of all studies can be interpreted both from language learning perspectives and teaching perspectives. Output, as its name appears, refers to the language in which a learner produces and a listener perceives. In last two decades, researchers concentrated more on input rather than output in their studies as an element for acquiring second language. However, recently some researchers have focused more on the role of output practice in acquiring language (e.g., Hanaoka, 2007; Izumi, 2003; Kormos, 2006; Swain, 1995, 2005).

The understanding and definition of PO, for most part, is grounded in Swain' data collection from a Canadian French immersion program. Swain (1985, 1995) mentioned that immersion program in Canada proved that comprehensible input alone was insufficient to ensure that learners achieved high levels of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence. Those immersion students found to be weak in grammatical accuracy while they had high level of listening skills and communicative fluency. Swain concluded that the lack of grammatical accuracy of immersion learners could be attributable to the restricted chances to produce output or for being pushed to produce output (p.249). Swain (1985) asserted that "producing the target language may be the trigger that forces the learner to pay attention to the means of expression needed in order to successfully convey his or her intended meaning" (p. 249). Moreover, Swain (1995, 2005) claimed that the production of output, notably PO, could enhance fluency and automaticity.

The door for the inclination toward thoroughly investigation of PO opened with the first proposal of Swain. Since that time various studies have valued the importance of PO in L2 learning. The concept PO was investigated in terms of *noticing* (Schmidt, 1990, 1995; Schmidt

& Frota, 1986; Swain, 1995), *hypothesis testing* (Swain, 1995), *automaticity* (Anderson, 1982, 1992; de Bot, 1996; DeKeyser, 1997; McLaughlin, 1987), *grammatical encoding and monitoring* (Izumi, 2003; Kormos, 2006), *stimulating syntactic processing* (de Bot, 1996; Izumi, 2000; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996; Swain, 1995) and finally *meta-analysis* (Keck, Iberri-Shea, Tracy-Ventura, & Wa-Mbaleka, 2006). While some studies demonstrated the benefit of PO in L2 learning (e.g., de la Fuente, 2002; He & Ellis, 1999; Izumi, 2002; Loewen, 2002; McDonough, 2001, 2005; Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993; Pica et al., 1996; Van den Branden, 1997), some other researches did not indicate positive effects of PO (Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara, & Fearnow, 1999; O'Reilly, Flatiz, & Kromrey, 2001; Takashima & Ellis, 1999).

What is meant by the concept of PO is that learners are “pushed” or “stretched” in their production as a necessary part of making themselves understood. Hence, they might modify a previous utterance or they might try out forms that they had not used before (Swain, 1985). Ellis (2003) defines PO as “output that reflects what learners can produce when they are pushed to use target language accurately and concisely” (p.349).

One way of promoting PO is through focused communicative tasks where learners are pushed to reproduce language form accurately (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993). When language learners are pushed to produce the target language, such production allows for deeper syntactic processing because they have to “move from the semantic, the open ended, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production” (Swain, 2000, p.99). Swain (1995) argues:

in producing the target language (vocally or subvocally) learners may notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say, leading

them to recognize that they don't know, or know only partially. In other words, under some circumstances, the activity of producing the target language may prompt second language learners to consciously recognize some of their linguistic problems: it may bring to attention something they need to discover about L2. (p. 125-126)

This hypothesis has motivated investigators with a theoretical framework to study the relationship between PO and other components of SLA. A plethora of studies have actually addressed this issue in the context of input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) and interaction hypothesis (Long, 1983, 1996).

In regard to Comprehensible Output Hypothesis (COH), PO motivates language acquisition to occur in a way that L2 learners are obliged to process language syntactically. When learners perceive a message as input they may pay no attention to syntactic analysis of the message but production makes the learners to concentrate on the form which the meaning is expressed. Therefore, this process can help learners be aware of their setbacks in their interlanguage (IL) and encourages the learners to find out a solution for their setbacks.

It must be informed that output and input should not be viewed as opposing poles in a dichotomy, but rather complementary means of acquiring language. (Izumi & Bigelow, 2000). There is not a fixed consensus among researchers on the positive impact of PO. Regarding linguistic features, many empirical studies have been conducted on noticing function of output. Izumi (2002) researched whether output and visual input could develop learners' SLA. Izumi's research showed that output could help learners attend to the target form. Shehadeh (2002) has claimed, after many years of investigations on the role comprehensible output, there is still shortage of information demonstrating that students' PO may have any impact on L2 learning.

Since oral proficiency is really important when teaching English, the recent curriculum concentrates on it through the realm of task based language teaching. Graham-Mar (2004) stresses the role of speaking skill in acquiring other skills such as reading and writing because the author believes that human brains are well-programmed to acquire language through sound and speech. According to Brown and Yule (1983), speaking is considered as the main skill that learners acquire. They also explain that fluency is as the ability to interact with each other much more than ability to write, listen and read. Learners evaluate their language proficiency based upon their achievement in oral communication.

In terms of previous research, this research is distinct in two main areas: 1) setting for the study, 2) the focus for the study. Firstly, the institutional context for this research will let me adapt contention regarding PO to a particular context. Most Swain's study has taken place in Canadian immersion program and other researchers used PO and conducted research in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (e.g., Sheen, 2008; Shehadeh, 1999). Second, regarding the focus of study, a plethora of studies focused on the impact of PO on linguistic forms or writing skills (Cumming, 1990; Donald & Lapkin, 2001; Hanaoka, 2007) and their results can't be applicable to oral proficiency as oral proficiency is a very distinct discipline.

### **1.3. Statement of the Problem**

Speaking is one of the four major skills which are essential for successful communication in any language, especially when the speakers are not speaking with their own first language. In the Iranian context of learning EFL, English teachers and professors continually discuss why the majority of English learners at schools, English institutes and even universities are unable to speak English particularly for communication in an authentic situation with international speakers. One among many reasons to take into consideration might be lack of PO in the form of