

*Journal of Teaching Language Skills (JTLS)*  
35(2), Summer 2016, ISSN: 2008-8191  
pp. 69-98

Lexis-Based Instruction and IELTS Candidates'  
Development of L2 Speaking Ability: Use of  
Formulaicity in Monologic Versus Dialogic Task

**Azizullah Mirzaei \***  
Associate Professor  
Shahrekord University  
mirzaei-a@lit.sku.ac.ir

**Mahmood Hashemian**  
Associate Professor  
Shahrekord University  
m72h@hotmail.com

**Mahshid Azizi Farsani**  
M.A, TEFL  
Shahrekord University  
mahshid.azizifarsani@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

Although lexis research (e.g., Lewis, 1997; Taguchi, 2008) has already evidenced the possibility of teaching formulaic sequences (FS), further research is still needed to examine the procedures or frameworks through which the approach can be applied and probe the second or foreign language (L2) areas where it demonstrates more relevance. This pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study aimed, firstly, to compare the effects of intensive and extensive lexis-based L2 instructions on the development of IELTS candidates' speaking performance and, secondly, to explore whether different types of speaking tasks (i.e., monologic vs. dialogic) have any differential effects on the frequency of using FS by L2 learners. To this end, three intact classes including 40 L2 learners preparing themselves for IELTS in a language center in Iran were randomly assigned to one control and two experimental groups. The groups received the same amount of instruction, however differently, two receiving intensive and extensive instructions in FS (or unanalyzed chunks) and the other receiving conventional non-lexis instruction. The results revealed that both lexis groups outperformed the control group pointing to the effectiveness of both intensive and extensive lexis-based instructions to the learners' development of speaking proficiency. Moreover, the results showed no significant difference between the effects of intensive and extensive types of lexis

---

Received: 16/06/2016      Accepted: 19/09/2016

\*Corresponding author

**instructions upon IELTS candidates' development of speaking performance. Further, it was revealed that dialogic tasks were more conducive to the FS use than monologic tasks. Finally, the implications for L2 theory and pedagogy are discussed.**

*Keywords:* formulaic sequences (FS), lexis-based instruction, speaking performance, unanalyzed chunks

Speaking appears intuitively the most important skill to be attained in L2 learning. Proficient learners show their language mastery by their ability in producing accurate and fluent speech. Thus, developing speaking proficiency seems to be an important goal for learners in most L2 learning contexts (Luoma, 2004).

From a lexis perspective, to develop ability in a language, learners need to learn not only individual L2 words, but also how they fit together to form lexical items (Wray, 2002). Hence, contrary to the traditional view of dividing language into grammar and vocabulary, lexis-based approaches highlight the importance of linguistic patterns, or unanalyzed chunks, that are stored and retrieved from the memory as a whole and serve particular meanings or functions (e.g., Ellis, 1998, 2003, 2005; Lewis, 1993, 2000; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Pawley & Syder, 1983; Sinclair, 1991; Wood, 2010; Wray, 2002).

The notion of 'lexis' which includes not only the single words but also word combinations stored in the mental lexicon is considered to play a central role in language teaching and learning. Lewis's (1993) lexis-based approach argued that lexis should be considered as the building blocks of language communication instead of grammar. He believed that "without grammar, little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (Lewis, 1993, p. 33). To develop speaking proficiency, lexis-based views tend to focus on learners' performance rather than competence, concentrate on teaching sequences of lexis, and consider possibility of formulaic sequences (FS) contribution to speech proficiency development (Wray, 2002).

Owing to the noteworthy role of FS in speaking proficiency, there has been a widespread concern over the significant role of FS in the field of language learning and teaching in recent years, especially in stressful contexts such as IELTS speaking situations. In these contexts, speaking is

mostly a difficult task since the contexts are constructed in real time and there is much strain on memory. The current study was therefore motivated by a lexis-based view to language teaching and aimed, firstly, to explore the effectiveness of different lexis-based instructional frameworks (i.e., intensive vs. extensive) in improving Iranian IELTS candidates' speaking performance. Further, the study sought any association between different types of speaking tasks (i.e., monologic vs. dialogic) and the frequency of using FS.

### Literature Review

Different researchers have referred to formulaic sequences by many different labels including *holophrases* (Corder, 1973), *prefabricated routines and patterns* (Hakuta, 1974), *formulaic speech* (Wong-Fillmore, 1976), *gambits* (Keller, 1979), *fixed grammatical frames* (Krashen & Scarcella, 1978), *lexical phrases* (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992), *lexicalized sentence stems* (Pawly & Syder, 1983), *speech formula* (Peters, 1983), and *formulas* (Ellis, 1994). Although formulaic sequences have been termed and defined differently by various researchers, it could be said that the most accepted definition is that proposed by Wray (2002). She defined FS as “a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is prefabricated: That is, stored and retrieved as a whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar” (Wray, 2002, p. 9).

As theorized by Schmitt (2004), formulaic sequences can be adopted as an overarching term for a very diverse category of lexical composition fulfilling a variety of functions. The broad category of FS contains simple fillers (e.g., *Sort of*), collocations (e.g., *Tell a story*), idioms (e.g., *Back to square one*), proverbs (e.g., *Let's make hay while the sun shines*), multiword metaphors (e.g., *Broken heart*), phrasal verbs (e.g., *Ask around*), and chain-based or lengthy standardized phrases (e.g., *There is a growing body of evidence that*).

According to several researchers, speaking fluency is highly influenced by the use of FS; therefore, learning to use a set of FS can bridge the gap between native and non-native speakers' production (e.g., Boers, Eyckmans,

Kappel, Stengers, & Demecheleer, 2006; Pawley & Syder, 1983; Ur, 1996; Wood, 2008; Wray, 2002). Wood (2008) argued that formulaic sequences, because of their holistic nature, help interlocutors save their time and energy in an appropriate way to facilitate and enhance their communications. In this respect, recent studies have suggested that the acquisition and appropriate use of FS is crucial for learners to reach a higher level of speaking proficiency, fluency, and accuracy in the L2 (e.g., Nation, 2001; Wood, 2008, 2010; Wray, 2002).

Pawley and Syder (1983) asserted that language learners rely generally on creativity and produce grammatically well-formed utterances which many of them are not commonly used by native speakers. The researchers found that native-like fluency is highly associated with the degree of storing and retrieving formulaic constructions from lexical repertoire of the learners and few non-native speakers can fully acquire the native speaker repertoire of formulaic sequences. They called this phenomenon one of the two puzzles of linguistic theory (i.e., native-like selection and native-like fluency). They defined native-like selection as “the ability of native speakers to convey meanings by expressions that are not only grammatical but also natural and idiomatic” and native-like fluency as “the ability of native speakers to produce fluent stretches of spontaneous connected discourse which exceeds human capacities for encoding novel speech in advance or while speaking” (Pawley & Syder 1983, p. 190).

Wray and Perkins (2000) maintained that the use of formulaic language can be seen as time-saving and facilitative for the interaction between language learners and language users. Furthermore, in regard to communicative functions of formulaic language, it contributes to easier comprehension and production of the L2 in real time communications. In terms of comprehension, the use of FS helps the listener spare enough time for processing the information and, as for the production, it enables the speaker organize the discourse proficiently and sound more natural. Also, the use of FS adds to speech fluency by decreasing the processing load in the mind while speaking.

Wood (2002) discussed the relationship between FS mental processing and fluency and attributed the appropriate and agile production of most

speech acts and familiar concepts to the capacity of language to be expressed formulaically. He claimed that if a speaker can retrieve FS readily from memory, fluency is enhanced. This procedure decreases the amount of time devoted to the encoding procedure and, consequently, speaker has more time for meditating on other speech necessities such as generating specific lexical items, predicting the next unit of discourse, and syntactic organizing of novel pieces. He has investigated the fluency of L2 production from a different aspect as well and suggested that FS use enhances fluency by making pauses shorter and making the runs of speech between pauses longer.

Further, Wood (2008) claimed that the degree of novelty in utterances is often due to the extent of the use of FS. It means that the use of FS helps L2 learners experience less cognitive load while processing new utterances and, therefore, enables them to create more output in a shorter period of time. In addition, Wray and Fitzpatrick (2008) clarified that L2 learners can have better linguistic performance by efficient memorization of target language specific expressions. They also suggested that memorization can significantly improve both beginners and advanced learners' language production.

The concept of lexis-based instruction has generated a lot of research in recent years (Weinert, 2010). A range of recent studies have investigated the effects of implementing a lexis-based view using concordancers on L2 oral proficiency. Their results corroborated the effectiveness of the approach in improving students' L2 speaking skill. Boers et al. (2006) demonstrated a strong relationship between EFL learners' use of FS during interviews and the oral proficiency scores they received. The findings of their study revealed that as the number of the expressions the students used in the interviews increased, the raters tended to perceive them to be more fluent and idiomatic language users. In a similar vein, Wood (2010), for instance, in a study of ESL learners in Canada found that formulaic sequences are productive in speech fluency enhancement.

Taguchi (2007) conducted a study to examine chunk learning and the development of spoken discourse in Japanese as a foreign language. In the study, she examined the development of spoken discourse among L2

learners of Japanese who received practice on grammatical chunks. Participants were enrolled in an elementary Japanese course. They completed two tasks: A conversation task and a narrative task. The findings showed a notable development in the use of grammatical chunks at the end of the instruction. The students produced twice as many grammatical chunks in the second time they were tested on the two tasks. The range of the chunks also improved. Taguchi also indicated that type of speaking task had a significant impact on L2 production, that is, the frequency and range of the chunks in the narrative task were about half of those recorded in the conversation task. In another study, Taguchi (2008) examined the development of speaking for complexity and fluency of speech. Results indicated that learners improved on the frequency and range of the chunks they produced, and chunks served as database for more complex utterances. However, their processing speed, as was shown in the two oral fluency features, did not show any improvement.

Serrano, Stengers, and Housen's (2014) study regarding the acquisition of formulaic sequences was one of the few studies that was concerned with intensive versus regular EFL programs as a variable which was hypothesized to affect the efficacy of a lexis-based instruction. The focus of their study was on the number and range of formulaic sequences the participants used while performing an oral narrative. Their results showed a slight advantage for the learners in the intensive program.

Bakhshizadeh, Rahimi Domakani, and Rajaei (2015) studied the effect of explicit instruction of FS on oral proficiency improvement of young Iranian EFL students. The result of their study revealed that FS contributions can be significant for filling the gap in communicative competence of young Iranian EFL students. Based on the findings of their study, the researchers indicated that FS can be a solution to problems of teaching grammar to young learners in early levels of EFL and memorizing the words in chunks can improve the young learners' ability for predicting the words occurrence in a fixed order. Moreover, the researchers concluded that raising Iranian EFL students' awareness to use FS appropriately can develop their oral performance.

In another recent lexis-oriented study, Mirzaei, Rahimi Domakani, and Rahimi (2016) made an effort to put Lewis's (1993) lexical view to use in an Iranian EFL context using a teacher-designed multi-purpose software application named LexisBOARD. The findings of their study indicated that adoption of a lexis-based view to teach language skills can improve learners' awareness of employing lexical items in real language use.

Despite the recent attention devoted to exploring the efficacy of lexis-based instruction in enhancing the oral proficiency of L2 learners, surprisingly, the applicability and usefulness of different types of lexis-based instructions have not received adequate attention. Likewise, the effects of different speaking tasks (monologic vs. dialogic) on the use of FS have been under-explored. Therefore, the current study sought to address the following research questions.

1. Does lexis-based L2 instruction emphasizing formulaic sequences have any significant effects on Iranian IELTS candidates' L2 speaking performance?
2. Is there any significant difference between the L2 speaking performance of IELTS candidates who receive intensive lexis-based L2 instruction and the (speaking) performance of those who receive extensive lexis-based L2 instruction?
3. Does the type of speaking task (i.e., monologic vs. dialogic) have any significant effect on the frequency of the use of formulaic sequences by IELTS candidates?

## Method

### Participants

The participants comprised 40 male and female IELTS candidates in the form of three intact classes from a Language Center in Tehran. The participants' English proficiency was estimated to be at an upper intermediate to advanced level based on the results of an IELTS proficiency test administered by the institute prior to the course. Their age ranged from 19 to 25 ( $M = 23$ ,  $SD = 2.79$ ). All the participants had Persian as their L1, and none of them had lived in an English speaking country. The three intact classes were randomly assigned to one control and two experimental

(intensive and extensive) lexis groups. There were 11 IELTS candidates in the extensive group, 14 in the intensive group, and 15 candidates in the control group.

### **Instruments and Materials**

**IELTS speaking test.** The first instrument used in order to assess the participants' speaking performance, before and after the treatment, was an IELTS speaking sample test. The test consisted of an interview lasted between 11 and 14 minutes in three separate parts. In the first part, the participant and the researcher introduced themselves. The participants then answered general questions on familiar topics (e.g., work, study, home town, etc.) for a time period of four to five minutes. In the second part, the participants were given a task card with prompts and were asked to talk on a particular topic (e.g., Describe a time when you helped someone). The participants had one minute to prepare and they could make notes if they wished, before speaking for between one and two minutes. This part lasted between three and four minutes. Finally, in the third part, the assessor and the participants became engaged in a discussion of more abstract issues (e.g., Why should neighbors help each other?) which were thematically linked to the topic in the second part. The discussion lasted between four and five minutes. The first two parts were considered as monologues, and the third part was treated as a dialogic task.

In order to eliminate the practice effect of utilizing the same version as the pretest and posttest, two different but equivalent speaking tests were adopted from Cullen, French, and Jakeman (2014) and used as the pretests and posttests. Expert judgements were obtained from two experienced IELTS instructors and two university professors to ensure about the suitability of the tasks for the intended purposes. Further, two standardization meetings were held between the assessor and one university professor, and two trial sessions were initially carried out to ensure that the tasks were consistently conducted by the assessor.

**IELTS speaking band descriptors.** IELTS speaking band descriptors, public version, developed by British Council was employed as the scoring scale to assess the speaking performance of the participants on both



speaking pretests and posttests. According to this manual, a test taker's speaking performance was assessed based on four criteria of fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation on a nine-band scale (from one to nine). According to this manual, each band score corresponded to some descriptive statements which gave a summary of the English language ability of the participant classified at that level. An average score of the four criteria mentioned above was computed as the total IELTS speaking test score for each individual.

**IELTS Preparation Course book.** The book titled *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* (Cullen, French, & Jakeman, 2014), published by Cambridge University Press, was utilized as the basis of the tasks and activities employed during the study. This book is designed for candidates of any level intending to take the IELTS test. The book is accompanied with a DVD-Rom including IELTS speaking video files along with a commentary to explain the candidates' scores in a way to simulate the original IELTS setting and procedures. Appendix A presents an example of FS use exercises extracted from the book.

### **Procedure**

Owing to the practical constraints, the students were not randomly selected and assigned to the groups. This limitation led to employing intact classes as the experimental and control groups and, as a result, a quasi-experimental method was adopted for this inquiry. Therefore, three intact classes in an IELTS institute in Tehran were randomly assigned to two experimental groups and one control. Two intact classes, containing 11 and 14 IELTS candidates, constituted the extensive and intensive experimental groups, respectively, and a third class, consisting of 15 IELTS candidates, formed the control group.

Firstly, the IELTS speaking pretest was administered to all the participants in order to assess their initial proficiency in speaking as the pretest scores. The participants were interviewed individually in a quiet room, and the interviews were recorded on tape. Then, the recordings were analyzed and marks (scores) were given using the IELTS speaking band descriptors.

As mentioned earlier, the participants were graded on four different criteria of fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation on a nine-band scale. Accordingly, the average of these four sub-scores was considered as the overall speaking score for each participant. In addition, the analysis of the pretest recordings provided the opportunity to count the frequency of FS used by each candidate in different parts of speaking pretest (monologue and dialogue).

Due to the probable rating inconsistencies involved in the assessment of speaking performance, another IELTS instructor (an EFL teacher with 15 years of experience in teaching TOEFL and IELTS courses) was invited to take part in the scoring procedure as well as in counting the frequency of FS used by the candidates during different speaking tasks of monologue and dialogue. The elicited data sets by the two judges (the researcher and the IELTS expert) were used to calculate inter-raters reliability utilizing Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, albeit 'adjusted' for two raters, using Spearman Brown prophecy formula. According to the results, the strong correlation between two sets of speaking scores ( $r = .756$ ,  $Adj = .86$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and between the data sets reported as the frequency of using FS ( $r = .825$ ,  $Adj = .90$ ,  $p < .01$  for) indicated an acceptable degree of inter-rater agreement.

After administering the pretest, all the participants were enrolled in a two-month English language course that met two times a week for one and a half hours each session. The experimental and control groups received the same amount of class instruction (over 24 hours) and were exposed to the same authentic language input. The only controlled variable was the varying emphasis given to the importance of chunk-noticing from one group to the other as the following:

In the extensive experimental group, the participants were exposed to extensive chunk practicing and their attention was directed to a large number of formulaic sequences including various types of multiword units and unanalyzed chunks. Activities and exercises which formed part of the course materials for this group were designed to raise the participants' phrasal awareness. The learners of the extensive group, initially, received an introduction to the concept as well as categories of formulaic sequences

explaining the variety and nuances inherent in the vast array of these features (See the sample handout in Appendix B). Then, they were provided and familiarized with several examples for each of the different types of FS. Afterwards, the learners were provided with a number of selected FS and were asked to use them as they were engaging in different speaking tasks such as conversation, simulation, discussion, and such during the class time. After providing some time to helping the students notice the FS (one session at the most), new items were introduced.

With regard to the intensive experimental group, the treatment implementation procedure was identical to the extensive experimental group. The only difference was that in this group, the focus was on teaching a much more limited number of FS, whereas, the participants received intensive exposure to their features and a sufficient amount of practice. That is, in the intensive group, students had the opportunity to encounter the same formulas or chunks several times. In contrast to the extensive group, a long period of time was dedicated to practicing and mastering the presented items. In this group, after introducing the general concept and various types of FS, a limited number of pre-planned FS (Appendix C) were presented to the class using a variety of instructional materials (audio and video). Then, the learners were repeatedly, and under the instructor's guidance, given textual enhancement of lexis and were asked to identify or highlight different types of FS individually, in pairs, or in groups. To make the use of FS typologically salient, different strategies such as using bold typeface, color-coding, or underlining the items were used. In addition, the students were asked to work individually, in pairs or in groups to create dialogues or short stories using different FS discussed in the class. Moreover, suitable topics were presented to all the participants and they were given the opportunity to practice oral communication using the lexical chunks provided during the class.

In the control group, attention was given to individual words and grammar patterns and L2 was analyzed in a more traditional way. In other words, in the control condition, metalinguistic explanations were used to exemplify grammar patterns and draw students' attention to vocabulary at a paradigmatic level (i.e., by looking at the place of individual words in

lexical networks alongside synonyms, antonyms, and so forth). Students of this group performed grammar and vocabulary activities and exercises instead of practicing pre-fabricated units.

At the end of the course (i.e., after 24 hours of instruction), the IELTS speaking posttests were collected in a similar fashion to the pretest time. The same scoring method was used. In addition, the frequency of FS used by each candidate in different parts of the speaking posttests (monologue and dialogue) was computed after analyzing the transcriptions.

## Results

### Efficacy of Lexis-based Instruction (intensive vs. extensive)

To compare the achievement of the candidates in the intensive, extensive, and control groups on the IELTS speaking test from the pretests to the posttests, both descriptive and inferential statistics was calculated. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest speaking scores in all three groups of the study.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics of IELTS Speaking Scores*

Group	Variable	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
Extensive	Pretest	11	3.0	5.0	4.04	.61	.20	-.11
	Posttest	11	3.5	5.5	4.54	.61	-.61	.25
Intensive	Pretest	14	4.5	6.5	5.79	.64	-.57	-.55
	Posttest	14	5.0	6.5	6.25	.64	-.38	-.71
Control	Pretest	15	3.0	5.0	4.37	.61	-.76	.11
	Posttest	15	3.0	5.5	4.50	.65	-.89	.72

As shown in Table 1, the skewness values for all the data sets were between -1 and +1 indicating that the distribution of the scores was rather symmetrical around the mean and the kurtosis values were so small, indicating that the distributions tend to be rather normal. The pretest speaking mean scores were 4.04, 5.79, and 4.37 in the extensive, intensive and control groups, respectively. That is, the pretest mean score in the

intensive group was larger than those in the other groups. The posttest mean scores were 4.54, 6.25, and 4.50 in the extensive, intensive, and control groups, respectively, meaning that all the three groups showed an increase from the pretest to posttest to some extent; however, the greater amount of improvement belonged to the extensive and intensive groups, respectively. Results related to the pretest and posttest mean scores are shown graphically in Figure 1 below.

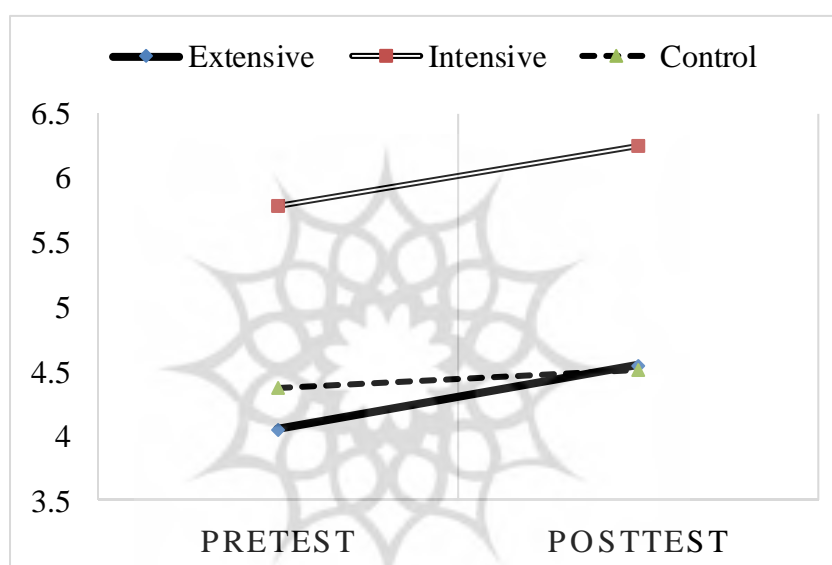


Figure 1. Pretest to posttest mean-score changes

As illustrated in Figure 1, the steep increase in the mean scores (from pretest to posttest) in the extensive and intensive groups in comparison with the gentle slope of the changes in the control group showed more improvement in the speaking scores of their participants after receiving the treatment.

To examine whether receiving lexis-based L2 instruction emphasizing formulaic sequences affected Iranian IELTS candidates' speaking performance significantly, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to compare the speaking posttest scores while controlling for pre-existing (pretest) differences among the groups. However, it was extremely important first, to make sure that the data can actually be analyzed using ANCOVA by checking the main underlying assumptions including

normality of the dependent variable (posttest scores) for each category of independent variable (group), homogeneity of the variances, homogeneity of the regression slopes, and finally, no interaction between the treatment in different groups and the pretest scores. Consequently, all the assumptions were checked and no violation was witnessed (see Appendix D).

The main ANCOVA results are reported in Table 2 below.

Table 2  
*ANCOVA Results for the Effects of Instructions*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	39.96 <sup>a</sup>	3	13.32	198.46	.000	.943
Intercept	.26	1	.26	3.88	.056	.097
Pretest	12.69	1	12.69	189.02	.000	.840
Group	1.16	2	.58	8.66	.001	.325
Error	2.42	36	.07			
Total	1093.00	40				
Corrected Total	42.37	39				

a. R Squared = .906 (Adjusted R Squared = .903)

As Table 2 displays, there was a significant effect for the *group* variable representing the type of instruction indicating statistically significant posttest score differences across the groups,  $F(2,36) = 8.66$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Moreover, the effect size value was large (i.e., 0.325), indicating that 32.5% of the variance in the dependent variable (posttest speaking scores) could be explained by the difference in the independent variable (i.e., different types of instructions).

Table 3 shows the adjusted means (i.e., the mean without the effect of covariate) on the posttest scores for each of the groups.

Table 3  
*Estimated Marginal (Adjusted) Means*

Groups	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Extensive	5.23 <sup>a</sup>	.09	5.04	5.42
Intensive	5.30 <sup>b</sup>	.10	5.10	5.50
Control	4.88 <sup>a</sup>	.07	4.74	5.03

As seen in Table 3, the intensive ( $M = 5.30$ ) and extensive groups ( $M = 5.23$ ) outperformed the control group ( $M = 4.88$ ) on the speaking posttests. Given the significant difference among the three groups (i.e. extensive, intensive, and control), Table 4 shows the results of Bonferroni corrected post-hoc comparisons to determine the location of the difference based on the estimated marginal means.

Table 4  
*Pairwise Comparisons for the Different Groups*

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Extensive--Intensive		-.07	.16	.966	-.46	.33
Extensive--Control		.35*	.11	.006	.08	.61
Intensive--Control		.41*	.14	.014	.07	.76

As Table 4 displays, there were significant differences between the extensive and control groups ( $p = .006$ ) as well as the intensive and control groups ( $p = .014$ ) since the p-value of their respective post-hoc tests were lower than the specified level of significance (.05). The only non-significant difference between groups was found between the intensive and extensive groups ( $p = .966$ ). In simpler terms, the speaking performance of the IELTS candidates who benefited from each type of lexis-based L2 instruction increased significantly compared to those in the control group who received no lexis instruction. In addition, although the candidates in the intensive

group on average outperformed those in the extensive group, the difference between these two groups' adjusted means was not statistically significant.

### FS use Variation between Monologic and Dialogic Tasks

As mentioned earlier, each speaking test consisted of three separate parts. The first two parts of each talk, lasting about nine minutes, were considered as monologue, and the third part, lasting about five minutes, was treated as dialogue. Considering the different time limits provided for each speaking tasks and in order to report a comparable descriptive statistics of the frequency of using FS, the *frequency of FS used per minute in monologue/dialogue* was operationalized by dividing the frequency of FS used over the time provided for monologue/dialogue by the maximum amount of time considered for the task (nine for monologue and five for dialogue). Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the frequency of FS used per minute for two different speaking tasks of monologue and dialogue in the speaking posttest.

Table 5  
*Descriptive Statistics for the Lexis Groups' use of FS*

Group	Speaking task	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Extensive	Monologue	11	.44	1.00	.70	.16	.44	.19
	Dialogue	11	.80	1.80	1.24	.29	.54	-.12
Intensive	Monologue	14	.44	1.22	.89	.22	-.64	.05
	Dialogue	14	1.00	2.20	1.50	.31	.57	.64

As Table 5 demonstrates, in both groups, the frequency means of FS used per minute were greater for the dialogic task part ( $M = 1.24$  and  $M = 1.50$  for the extensive and intensive groups, respectively) compared to the monologic parts ( $M = .70$  and  $M = .89$  for the extensive and intensive groups, respectively).

To seek whether type of speaking task had any significant effects on the frequency of using FS by IELTS candidates, a Paired Sample *t*-test was



conducted. The assumption of normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was checked and found to be insignificant, meaning that normality assumption is met (see appendix D). Table 6 below shows the *t*-test results.

Table 6  
*Paired Samples T-test Results*

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1: Extensive	Monologue Dialogue	-.54	.34	.10	-.77	-.31	-5.20	10	.000
Pair 2: Intensive	Monologue Dialogue	-.61	.28	.07	-.77	-.45	-8.29	13	.000

As displayed in Table 6, in both intensive and extensive groups, the differences between the mean frequency of FS used per minute for dialogue and monologue were statistically significant,  $t(10) = -5.20$ ,  $p < .005$  with a large effect size (.73) for the extensive group, and  $t(13) = -8.29$ ,  $p < .005$  with a large effect size (.84) for the intensive group. Accordingly, it was concluded that higher frequency of FS used by the participants during dialogue in comparison with monologue was not due to chance variation but apparently due to the type of speaking tasks.

### Discussion

The results revealed that after controlling for the potential differences between groups, the speaking performance of the IELTS candidates who benefited from either extensive or intensive type of lexis-based L2 instruction increased significantly compared to those in the control group who received no lexis instruction. In other words, the results supported the effectiveness of both types of lexis-based instructions on enhancing the IELTS candidates' use of FS and, thus, speaking performance. The main logic behind this finding would be explainable by reference to the

theoretically assumed shifts taking place across the stages of language production (Wood, 2010). According to Wood (2010), language production involves three stages of conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. It seems that receiving lexis-based L2 instruction emphasizing FS, or unanalyzed chunks, provided some comfort for the participants within the demanding skill of speaking and let their minds focus only on the effortless process of activating ready-made sentences and phrases instead of going through the complicated and intricate stages of conceptualization and formulation. Consequently, it may be concluded that applying the fixed multi-words stored in L2 learners' long term memory, which are retrieved automatically, rather than always constructing novel utterances online, can be considered as a shortcut to reach the ultimate stage of articulation that may facilitate communication in turn.

Moreover, the findings, by implication, can be linked to the ACT-R theory of Anderson (2000) which proposed three stages of skill acquisition as declarative, procedural, and automatic. Producing utterances word by word relying on grammatical resources demanded a high cognitive load from memory for the learners (in the speaking pretest). By being provided with FS, participants of the experimental groups could represent shifting from declarative stage to the second, that is, procedural stage (in the speaking posttest). In this case, they have processed the whole sentences as single items because they did not anymore construct sentences by filling the slots in grammatical patterns with words. Given that formulaic sequences are multiword units which learners deal with cognitively as single words, it seems reasonable to presume that knowledge of FS may be automatized which could subsequently allow it to occur fluently under the time constraints of a predesigned speaking test.

However, few research projects have investigated whether training in formulaic sequences has positive effects on oral language proficiency considering the sub-skills of fluency and accuracy separately (e.g., Boers et al., 2006). To a greater extent, there has been no empirical evidence of examining the effects of such lexis-based instructions on the IELTS speaking performance of L2 learners. In general, findings related to the first research question of this study corroborated the view often expressed in the

literature that the use of formulaic language can enhance learners' fluency and accuracy in oral communication.

The results also supported those of Boers et al. (2006), who conducted a small scale experiment in which a pedagogical intervention involving tasks encouraging the noticing of formulaic sequences was used. The results of their study showed that "the use of formulaic sequences . . . was shown to be especially beneficial to perceptions of learners' fluency and range of expression" (Boers et al., 2006, p. 257). The findings of the current study were also in line with McGuire's (2009) which supported the favorable effect of instruction in formulaic sequences upon speech fluency. It was reported that most of the participants in the experimental group whose consciousness was raised through highlighting FS in model listening texts, practicing FS use in role plays, and having additional examples of useful FS taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) increased their formulaic language use and fluency at the end of the course.

Based on the results, although the intensive group on average outperformed those in the extensive group, the difference was not statistically significant. This finding seems runs counter to that of Serrano et al. (2014) who concluded that there is a slight advantage for the learners in the intensive program compared to those in a regular (non-intensive) program. This disagreement would be justified by providing a comparison of the operational definitions of intensive FS courses in both contexts. Serrano et al. (2014) simply considered different time concentration of instructional hours to define intensive and regular program, whereas in this study, two types of instruction were defined regarding the method of instruction; that is, in the intensive FS instruction the focus was on teaching a limited number of FS and participants received intensive exposure to them and sufficient amount of practice. The extensive FS instruction, however, was perceived as the teaching context in which participants received limited exposure to a larger number of FS than taught in the intensive lexis-based instruction.

Further, from a psycholinguistic perspective, each speaking performance was scored as an average score of four oral production sub-skills, i.e., fluency and coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. In the intensive lexis group, the learners had

the opportunity to encounter a limited amount of FS and chunks several times. Thus, every item was repeated many times and reviewed constantly. It might have enabled them to produce more accurate and precise utterances and, in turn, improved the sub-skills of accuracy and pronunciation. Nonetheless, it may have reduced the flexibility required to convey precise meanings for various topics drawing on the lexical resources sub-skill. On the other hand, the students in the extensive group might have built up a larger repertoire of FS which could add to the lexical resources sub-skill; however, just to redress the balance, this could have had a reverse impact on accuracy or pronunciation, considering the insufficient time devoted to completely mastering the items.

As the results showed, in both intensive and extensive groups, the frequency of the use of FS increased from monologic to dialogic tasks. The significance of this finding can be highlighted by drawing a conceptual comparison between the two types of speaking tasks employed in the study. According to Wood (2010), language production model, various components including conceptualization, formulation, and articulation of message, must work simultaneously when speaking. Compared with a dialogic task, a monologic task poses greater processing demands. In a monologic task, the speaker is the only director of the discourse scenario, meaning that, the speaker has the sole responsibility to pass all perceived stages of language production in real-time. However, due to its interactive nature, a dialogic task, such as a two-way conversation discourse, is jointly constructed between the speaker and the interviewer and this could prepare the ground for employing more interactive features, such as turn-taking and backchannel cues. These interactive features often help speakers 'buy' time to process information and plan for the direction of the discourse. In the monologues, however, the learners did not have enough processing time and, as a result, they had difficulty in accessing the chunks while trying to manage other cognitive or procedural demands of speaking. In brief, this finding lent supplementary support to Taguchi (2007) study that showed a notable development in the use of grammatical chunks at the end of the instruction suggesting that the type of speaking task has significant impacts on production, that is, the frequency and range of the chunks in the narrative

as a monologic task were about half of those recorded in the conversation as a dialogic task.

### Conclusions and Implications

This study intended to investigate the effect of lexis-based instruction on the development of IELTS candidates' speaking performance. Moreover, the study examined whether the type of lexis-based L2 instruction (intensive vs. extensive) had any significant effect on IELTS candidates' speaking performance. The findings of the study revealed that receiving lexis-based instruction emphasizing FS (i.e., standardized phrases such as collocations and idiomatic expressions) enabled Iranian IELTS candidates to build up a good repertoire of L2 lexicon required for active use. By turning this knowledge into a strategic advantage, through noticing and recycling word combinations to which they had just been exposed, IELTS candidates had a chance to improve their speaking performances.

The results also revealed that both intensive and extensive lexis-based instructions developed the speaking performance of Iranian IELTS candidates somehow to a similar extent. While an intensive instruction in which a massive number of hours of practice devoted to master a limited number of FS would enhance the learners' accuracy and promote accurate pronunciation, extensive instruction can provide a wider range of prefabricated utterances and prepare the candidates to discuss a variety of topics and might affect the sub-skill of lexical resources optimally. The balance and interplay between these potential changes across these sub-skills would have led to a non-significant difference between the intensive and extensive types of instructions. Furthermore, in both intensive and extensive lexis groups, IELTS candidates demonstrated much more frequency of FS use while they were engaging in a dialogic talks compared to the time when they were asked a general question or given a topic and were asked to talk monologically for a definite period of time.

Overall, the findings of the current study implied that the effective use of formulaic sequences can, indeed, be a useful mechanism to improve speaking proficiency. Pedagogically, knowing the effects of learning FS can be of paramount importance to all IELTS practitioners (e.g., IELTS teachers

and candidates) as well as EFL teachers and learners in most EFL contexts. Thus, IELTS instructors as well as other language teachers should not only teach individual words and grammatical rules, but they should also pay special attention to L2 formulaicity.

### References

- Anderson, J. (2000). *Cognitive psychology and its implications* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). New York: Worth.
- Bakhshizadeh, Y., Rahimi Domakani, M., & Rajaei, M. (2015). The effect of explicit instruction of formulaic sequences on oral proficiency improvement of young Iranian EFL students. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 3(10), 44-52.
- Boers, F., Eyckmans, J., Kappel, J., Stengers, H., & Demecheleer, M. (2006). Formulaic sequences and perceived oral proficiency: Putting a lexical approach to the test. *Language Teaching Research* 10(3), 245-261.
- Cullen, P., French, A., & Jakeman, V. (Ed.) (2014). *The official Cambridge guide to IELTS*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and UCLES.
- Corder, S. P. (1973). *Introducing applied linguistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, N. (1998). Emergentism, connectionism, and language learning. *Language Learning*, 48(4), 631-64.
- Ellis, N. (2003). Constructions, chunking, and connectionism: The emergence of second language structure. In C. Doughty & M. Long (Eds.), *Handbook in SLA* (pp. 63-103). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ellis, N. (2005). SLA the associative-cognitive creed. *Paper presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Applied Linguistics*. Madison, Wisconsin.
- Hakuta, K. (1974). Prefabricated patterns and the emergence of structure in second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 24, 287-298.
- Keller, R. (1979). Gambits: Conversational strategy signals. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 3, 219-237.

- Krashen, S. & Scarcella, R. (1978). On routines and patterns in language acquisition and performance. *Language Learning*, 28(2), 283-300.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *The lexical approach. The state of ELT and a way forward*. Hove, UK: Language Teaching Publications.
- Lewis, M. (1997). *Implementing the lexical approach: Putting theory into practice*. Hove, England: Language Teaching Publications.
- Lewis, M. (2000). Materials and resources for teaching collocation. In M. Lewis (Ed.), *Teaching collocation: Further development in the lexical approach* (pp. 186-204). Hove, UK: Language Teaching Publications.
- Luoma, S. (2004). *Assessing speaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGuire, M. (2009). *Formulaic sequences in English conversation: Improving spoken fluency in non-native speakers*. Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Denton, TX: University of North Texas, Denton, Texas.
- Mirzaei, A., Rahimi Domakani, M., & Rahimi, S. (2016). Computerized lexisbased instruction in EFL classrooms: Using multi-purpose LexisBOARD to teach L2 vocabulary. *ReCALL*, 28(1), 22-43.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nattinger, J. R., & DeCarrico, J. S. (1992). *Lexical phrases and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pawley, A., & Syder, H. (1983). Two puzzles for linguistic theory: Native like selection and native-like fluency. In J. Richards & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp.191-226). London: Longman.
- Peters, A. M. (1983). *Units of language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Serrano, R., Stengers, H., & Housen, A. (2014). Acquisition of formulaic sequences in intensive and regular EFL programmes. *Language Teaching Research*, 1-18.
- Schmitt, N. (Ed.). (2004). *Formulaic sequences: Acquisition, processing, and use* (Vol. 9). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Sinclair, J. (1991). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Taguchi, N. (2007). Chunk learning and the development of spoken discourse in a Japanese as a foreign language classroom. *Language Teaching Research, 11*(4), 433-457.
- Taguchi, N. (2008). Building language blocks in L2 Japanese: Chunk learning and the development of complexity and fluency in spoken production. *Foreign Language Annals, 41*(1), 130-154.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weinert, R. (2010) Formulaicity and usage-based language: Linguistic, psycholinguistic and acquisitional manifestations. In D. Wood (Ed.), *Perspectives on formulaic language: Acquisition and communication* (pp. 1-20). London: Continuum.
- Wong-Fillmore, L. (1976). *The second time around: Cognitive and social strategies in second language acquisition*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.
- Wood, D. (2002). Formulaic language in acquisition and production: Implications for teaching. *TESL Canada Journal, 20*(1), 1-15.
- Wood, D. (2008). Mandarin Chinese speakers in a study abroad context: Does acquisition of formulaic sequences facilitate fluent speech in English. *The East Asian Learner, 3*(2), 43-62.
- Wood, D. (2010). *Formulaic language and second language speech fluency: Background, evidence and applications*. London: Continuum.
- Wray, A. (2002). *Formulaic language and the lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wray, A., & Fitzpatrick, T. (2008). Why can't you just leave it alone? Deviations from memorized language as a gauge of native like competence. In F. Meunier & S. Granger (Eds.), *Phraseology in foreign language learning and teaching* (pp. 123-148). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Wray, A., & Perkins, M. R. (2000). The functions of formulaic language: An integrated model. *Language & Communication, 20*(1), 1-28.



## Appendix A

Sample of FS use exercises

**Question one:** Do you like listening to music? Why/Why not?

**Sample answer:**

For sure I do. A piece of music can calm me down (make me relax) and make me happy. Specifically, when I am under the weather (feeling down, feeling depressed), haunting melodies can totally (very much) help me. I think music is an important part of my life since it helps me let go of my problems (release someone or something).

**Question two:** What kind of music do you like, why?

**Sample answers:**

1. To tell the truth, I am a big fan of pop music, but I don't have a pop idol. I like it because of its catchy tunes and because it can be used for background music. I listen to different singers specially those who give a virtuoso performance. And I have made a mix tape of my own. I really like it.

2. I literally listen to everything since I have quite a big family with different tastes. I love all kinds of music. However, I'm not into modern rap and rock. I'm into all the old stuff that had meaning. But my guilty pleasure is trance, vocal trance to be more specific.

3. I'm good at pretty much everything. I must admit I like quite a broad range of music.

4. Actually, call me old fashioned, but I do enjoy listening to classical music.

**Question three:** When do you usually listen to music?

**Sample answers:**

1. That is really a tough question because I can't exactly tell you when. I prefer easy listening when I feel blue (feel depressed), and I usually listen to music while I am driving. It is really fun.

2. Whenever I feel down (upset) and I'm trying to ride the wave of that current mood of depression, I go with mellow (light) or dark music and if I'm trying to snap out of it, then I'd listen to songs that remind me of better times, a song that is tied with fond memories. Or if I am extremely furious (angry) again I listen to songs that I can get all my anger and emotions out to. And sometimes, whenever I have nothing to do I go for music.

## Appendix B

### Introduction to formulaic sequences handout

Formulaic Sequences (FS)			
General Definition	Categories	Definition	Examples
Two or more words used as a phrase or as a ready-made grammatical construction that is understood with one holistic meaning or purpose.	<b>Idioms</b>	A group of words that has a special meaning that is different from the ordinary meaning of each separate word	<i>Cry over spilt milk:</i> when you complain about a loss from the past
	<b>Proverbs</b>	A combination of words which form wise sayings and offer <b>advice</b> about how to live your life	<i>Better late than never:</i> It's best to do something on time. But if you can't do it on time, do it late.
	<b>Multiword Metaphors</b>	Exaggerated expressions aimed to convey a thought more forcefully than a plain statement would.	<i>Broken heart:</i> Your heart is not literally broken into pieces; you just feel hurt and sad
	<b>Phrasal Verbs</b>	An idiomatic phrase consisting of a verb and another element, typically either an adverb, as in <i>break down</i> , or a preposition, for example <i>see to</i> , or a combination of both	<i>Ask around:</i> ask many people the same question
	<b>Chain Based Phrases</b>	Pre-fabricated units used to start, link or terminate utterances	<i>As a matter of fact</i>

**Appendix C**  
**List of FS taught during the study course**

All abroad	To hang out with somebody	To go on a shopping spree	To exploit the talents
At a time like this	Barking up the wrong tree	Go out of business	On a regular basis
As good as deed	Taste of your own medicine	No question about it	In the light of the
Don't get me started at it	Be glad to see the back of	It would happen anytime soon	At the time of the
Everybody hands up and face the wall	Caught between two stools	Put up with	on the part of the
I don't mind if I do so	Don't give up the day job	At high speed	at the top/bottom of the
To catch up with somebody	Far cry from	To go of the problems	To be a bit on the chubby side
I'll make it up to you	Hit the nail on the head	Sharing an interest	by the end of the
To hit the glass ceiling	Last straw	Like the look of	for the first time since
Next things you know	Make a long story short	To be under the weather	as a result of the
See what I mean	To seek Solace in something	What's going on around here?	as a matter of fact
Pleased to meet you	To feel down	The way I figure is ....	at the same time
To put figure on something	Strike up a conversation	It is often argued that	in the case of the
That's all right	Get in touch with	That's no way to do that	the other side of the
That's no way to talk	Hit it off	Thanks indeed	in the middle of the
To make the right choice	It is not common to do something	in the early years of	To cut down on something
From dawn to dusk	As easy as a pie	on the far side of	Not surprisingly
is not to say that	on the part of the	in the context of a	Day in and day out
For the sake of something	If I'm not mistaken	To be a toss-up between something	To be into something
the far side of the	To some extent	as far as I know	I dread to think
To put in other words	for the first time in	but on the other hand	A clear-cut answer
but at the same time	by the end of the	do you want me to	due to the fact that
A well-paid career	Related to the areas of expertise	on the basis of the	To take the mind off
Generally Speaking	Honestly Speaking	Once in a blue moon	What's more

I do know	After a while	I won't ever be	To be honest
It goes back to	Totally different	It goes without saying that ....	I do like it
The reason why I do something	I surely do so	This is absolutely true	Every now and then
To climb up the career ladder	It would be appreciated	To answer this question	As a matter of fact
Stinks to high heaven	It is commonly acceptable	With a plethora of splendid	Trying to get at
In a good/bad mood	To be prone to do	Within easy walking distance	A big fan of
To take someone to do something	To Capture the hearts of the world	Keep someone at the edge of their seat	I thoroughly enjoyed
To me, it is and always will be	To get along pretty well with somebody	To freak somebody out	Barely ever
To make a big deal out of things	Health freak	I should admit that	To be press for time
To be fair	To name just a few	To drive someone crazy	Couch potato
As with everything	To be as busy as a bee	To make enough time to do something	Getting so dull
To find something interesting	To take something out	A sense of timelessness	To be devastated by something
For sure, I do	Let go out of the problems	To tell the truth	Pretty much every thing
Sure thing,	To feel blue	To snap out of something	To be too fussy
To run out of programs	To be stuck in a rut	To kick the habit of ...	For the time being
As far as I know	Correct me if I am wrong	From the very outset	To come out of nowhere
As a result	To try in vain	The advent of something	It goes without saying
To be about to leave	To spend a fortune	To be adept to do something	To come across something

### Appendix D Tests assumptions

Table 1.

*Tests of Normality on Posttest Scores in all Groups of the Study*

Variable	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Posttest scores	Extensive	.257	11	.041	.871	11	.080
	Intensive	.202	14	.126	.912	14	.166
	Control	.186	15	.170	.907	15	.121

Table 2.

*Test of Equality of Variance on Posttest Speaking Scores in Different Groups of the Study*

Levene's Test	F	df1	df2	Sig.
	.411	2	37	.666

Table 3.

*Analysis of Covariance on Speaking Scores for the Interaction Effect*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	40.000 <sup>a</sup>	5	8.000	114.550	.000
Intercept	.279	1	.279	3.995	.054
Group * Pre	.042	2	.021	.298	.744
Group	.116	2	.058	.829	.445
Pre	12.156	1	12.156	174.056	.000
Error	2.375	34	.070		
Total	1093.000	40			
Corrected Total	42.375	39			

a. R Squared = .944 (Adjusted R Squared = .936)

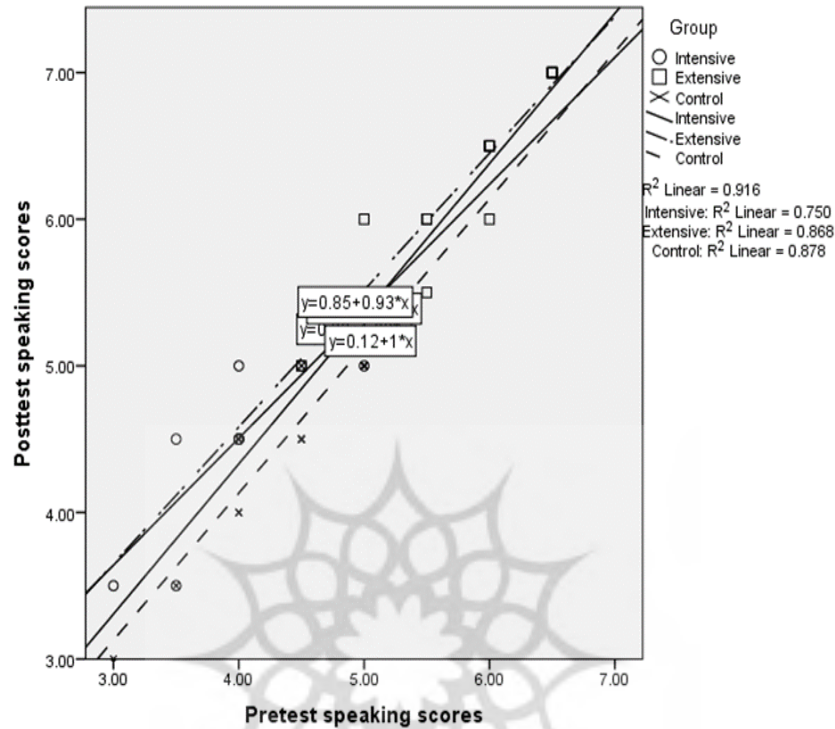


Figure 1. Relationship between the pretest and posttest scores in different groups of study

Table 5.

*Tests of Normality on the Frequency of FS Used per Minute in Both Experimental Groups of The Study*

Group	Speaking task	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Extensive	Monologue	.212	11	.178	.955	11	.707
	Dialogue	.186	11	.200*	.950	11	.641
Intensive	Monologue	.214	14	.081	.945	14	.491
	Dialogue	.160	14	.200*	.948	14	.530