

Dynamic Assessment And Oral Narrative Performance: A Voice From IranShahabaddin Behtary¹ (Corresponding Author) & Mehdi Adli²¹Department of English, Ardabil Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran²MA in ELT, English Teacher, Germi, Iran

Abstract: Dynamic assessment as an assessment method integrates instruction with assessment. Its theoretical framework is based on Vygotsky's notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development, and Feuerstein's concept of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE), a form of learning that occurs when a mediator intercedes between the learner and environmental factors. The present study investigates the effectiveness of using Dynamic Assessment (DA) on Iranian EFL learners' oral narrative performance. In this study the researchers investigated the amount of participants' development after a dynamic assessment procedure known as test-teach-retest method. To fulfill the purpose of the study two classes comprising thirty EFL learners were selected. In the first class (experimental group) dynamic assessment was used and in the second class (control group) static assessment was applied. In pretesting phase a wordless picture sequence was presented to the participants in order to develop a story related to the pictures. After the participants' first narration the teaching phase took place which lasted seven sessions. In the final stage by using the same wordless picture sequences all participants told the narrative again. In order to analyze the data from oral narratives, descriptive statistics of the tests were calculated to arrive at the means and standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores. T-test was used to measure the significance of the difference in the means of two groups on posttest. The findings revealed that participants in the dynamic assessment group produced higher narrative scores compared to the scores of participants in the static assessment group.

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Introduction

Traditionally, assessment is defined as a "means for controlling the context in which language performance takes place" (Bachman 1990). Dynamic assessment (DA) as a concept originates from Vygotsky (1978) and Feuerstein (1979). According to Vygotsky's cognitive development model, learning takes place during social interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The basic notion of this model is that a learner's unassisted performance in a particular task is improved when assistance is provided by an adult or a more capable peer. Similarly, Feuerstein's theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) is based on the learners' abilities to profit from mediation. In MLE the mediator engage with the learner in a task to see his/her potential for cognitive change. The main difference between DA and Static Assessment (SA) is that in DA the focus is on the process of learning rather than on product. In DA interaction and assistance during assessment is common and acceptable while in SA any kinds of assistance are considered threats to the reliability of tests. By modifying learners' performance in DA model the mediator is able not only to measure their current level of performance but also to foretell their potential abilities in performing particular task in the future.

A model of DA is known as test-teach-retest which consists of three phases (Pohner 2005). In the test phase, the examiner tests learners to determine their current level of performance. In the teaching phase learners take part in supported mediation sessions. During this phase the mediator acts and guides the learners according to their ZPD. In the retest phase, the examiner retests learners to measure the amount of learning that has occurred.

Vygotsky' Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky (1978) (as cited in Tzurriel 2000) proposed that in order to become aware of a learner's cognitive development, one should consider him/her in relation to cultural, social, and historical background. According to Vygotsky every learner's performance has two levels: Actual Development level (ADL) or zone of present development which is indicated by the learner's performance independently with no assistance or guidance from others and Zone of Proximal Development level (ZPD) which is understood by moving from the already existent level to higher levels by assistance or guidance provided by adults or more capable ones.

The introduction of these concepts by Vygotsky made researchers consider independent problem solving level and potential developmental level as two important parts of mental development in learning process.

Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience

Reuven Feuerstein constructed Structural Cognitive Modifiability (SCM) theory as his framework for DA. According to this theory "human beings are open rather than closed systems, meaning that human cognitive abilities are not fixed traits resulting purely from biology in the way that one's height and hair color are determined genetically, but rather they can be developed in a variety of ways depending on the presence and the quality of appropriate forms of interaction and instruction (Feuerstein, Rand, and Rynders. 1988, p. 5). A key concept of SCM is mediation. In mediated learning a more capable mediator interacts with the learner in a meaningful way and "selects, changes, amplifies, and interprets objects and processes to the child" (Kozulin 1998, p. 60). Feuerstein refers to such an interaction as Mediated Learning Experience (MLE).

An Overview of Existing literature

Jafary, Nordin and Mohajery (2012) studied the effect of dynamic assessment on Iranian EFL college preparatory learners' syntactic knowledge. They focused on the significant difference between dynamic and static assessment and the possible role of these two forms of assessment on the syntactic development of Iranian EFL college preparatory learners. They showed that there is a significant increase in the performance of subjects in DA group in comparison with the SA group.

Kramer, Mallet, Schneider and Hyward (2009) conducted a research to study the effect of dynamic assessment on narrative performance with grade three children. The results showed that children in dynamic assessment group outperformed in comparison with those in static assessment group. The study also showed that dynamic assessment is useful tool for identifying children with language learning difficulties.

Gillam, Peña, and Miller (1999) conducted a research to study dynamic assessment to evaluate children's narrative and expository discourse abilities. They found that dynamic assessment of narratives provides clinical insights into the learning process. They also concluded that this can provide teachers a common framework for instruction.

Pishghadam, Barabadi, and Kamrood (2011) investigated the different effects of computerized dynamic assessment of reading comprehension on high and low achievers. Their purpose was to find appropriate mediation that is effective for a large number of students. The results revealed that providing mediation in the form of hints contributed significantly to the increase of students' scores and consequently to the improvement of their text comprehension. Moreover, the study confirmed that

low achievers would benefit more than high achievers from a dynamic test of reading comprehension.

The purpose of this study was to see if a test-retest dynamic assessment (DA) design would show an increase in the measures of the participants' oral narrative abilities at posttest. The following research question guided this study: What is the effect of dynamic assessment (DA) on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' oral narrative performance?

Method

Participants

Two classes comprising of 30 students of a language institute were selected for this study. They were considered as the control group (CG) and the experimental group (EG). A TOEFL test had been administered by the institute to select homogeneous students. After selecting participants with scores one standard deviation above and below the mean they had been randomly divided into two homogeneous classes by the institute. 15 students were in each group. All of them were male Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Their age varied from 15 to 17 with the mean of 16. Azeri Turkish was the participants' mother tongue and Persian was their official language.

Materials

A wordless picture sequence was used to elicit the narrative samples. It consisted of eight laminated pictures. Students looked at all of the pictures in the story, and then were asked to tell a story to go along with the pictures. The students looked at the first picture and narrated the events in the first picture. After finishing the events in the first picture, they went to the second picture and told the events related to it. When the children finished telling the events in the second picture, they went to the third picture. The same procedure was then carried out for all of the pictures.

A microphone was also used to record the data. Participants' narratives on pretest and posttest were recorded by using this microphone. The researcher analyzed the data by listening to the records.

Procedures

One week before the DA program began, the pretest phase started. All the participants were given a non-dynamic pretest in the form of wordless picture sequence to determine their ability to create a narrative. The purpose of this phase was to determine the participants' independent performance level, or their Actual Developmental Level (ADL). In this phase the researcher put pictures in front of the children and asked them to create a story related to the pictures. No assistance or guidance was given to the participants. Insights gained from this assessment helped to match the DA program to the ZPD of the students by focusing on problematic areas.

Directly after the participants' first narration teaching phase took place which lasted for seven sessions. In dynamic assessment phase, the mediator provided individualized mediation and assistance, including prompts, hints, suggestions, explanation, etc. in an appropriate and meaningful manner. By using mediation, the mediator tried to help the learners tell more complete stories compared to the pretest.

In the posttest phase the participants again produced a narrative by using the same wordless picture sequences. The same procedure for analyzing and describing the pretest story was used for the posttest. In order to measure the amount of participants' development, no assistance or guidance was provided during the posttest. The posttest was scored using the same rubric as was used to score the pretest. The purpose of the non-dynamic posttest was to observe how much the learner has progressed over the seven sessions.

Scoring Rubric

The pretest and posttest were graded using the Narrative Scoring Scheme (NSS). The NSS is an assessment tool that provides an index of the student's ability to produce a coherent narrative. The Dynamic Assessment (DA) in this study took place during the teaching phase immediately after the first narrative task. This teaching phase aimed to direct the participants' attention to the seven elements of the story according to Narrative Scoring Scheme (NSS) which included introduction, character development, mental states, referencing, conflict resolution, cohesion, and conclusion (Heilmann, Miller, Nockerts & Dunaway 2010). The NSS is scored using a zero to five point scale. Five points were given if proficient performance was noted, three points for emerging use and one point for immature performance. Scores of two and four were used for intermediate performance. A score of zero were given for poor performance and for a variety of errors including telling the wrong story, not completing the task, and when target components of the NSS were imitated. The scores were added together to calculate a total score (the highest possible score being 35).

Design and Analyses

This study had a pretest-posttest design. In order to analyze the data from oral narratives, descriptive statistics of the tests were calculated to arrive at the means and standard deviation of the pretest and posttest scores. T-test was used to measure the difference in the means of two groups.

Validity and reliability

The test measures used in this study have been previously proved by Heilmann, Miller and Nockerts (2010) to assess narratives most effectively and were found to be valid measures of oral language abilities. They stated that NSS is the most sensitive scheme to

measuring narrative performance. Inter-rater agreement was calculated for 20% of testing forms from the main study. Six participants were randomly selected; in total 12 narratives were reanalyzed. Then the agreement between the two scorings was calculated. The results indicated a high inter-rater reliability of .89.

Results

In order to check the homogeneity of two groups on the pretest a t-test was used. The prerequisites of t-test including the normality of distribution of scores using Kolomogrow-Smirnov statistic was also considered. The results of the initial t-test showed no significant difference between the scores of groups on pretest.

The descriptive statistics for the scores of students on posttest is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Students' Scores on Posttest

Group	Mean	SD
EG	25.33	1.23
CG	20.87	1.12

Table 1 shows that the mean of experimental group (25.33) is more than the mean of control group (20.87).

After checking for the normality of distribution of posttest scores by means of Kolomogrow-Smirnov statistic, a t-test was used to seek the existence of a statistically significant difference between the scores of two groups on posttest. Table 2 below presents the results of t-test.

Table 2. Independent Samples T-test for Students' Scores on Posttest

t	df	Sig.	η^2
10.35	28	.00	.79

Based on Tables 1 and 2 it is evident that there was a significant difference in scores of experimental and control groups) $M_{EG} = 25.33$, $SD_{EG} = 1.23$, $M_{CG} = 20.87$, $SD_{CG} = 1.12$, $t(28) = 10.35$, $p = .00$. The magnitude of the difference in the means (4.467) was large. So the null hypothesis of the study which claimed that dynamic assessment has no effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' narrative performance was rejected.

Eta squared for the effect size was calculated which came to be .79 which is a large one.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to see if a test-retest dynamic assessment (DA) method would show an increase in the measures of participants' oral narrative abilities at posttest. It was confirmed that

participants in dynamic assessment group produced higher oral narrative scores compared to participants in the static assessment group.

The findings of our study are in line with those of Poher (2005). Pohner conducted an empirical DA study of oral communication among advanced learners of L2 French to investigate the effectiveness of the application of DA procedures to L2 learning. He demonstrated that DA is an effective means of understanding learner's abilities and helping them to overcome linguistic problems.

Our findings are also in line with those of Ajideh and Nourdad (2012). Ajideh and Nourdad designed a study to investigate the difference between applying dynamic and non-dynamic assessment of EFL reading comprehension ability and examining its immediate and delayed effects. The results of the study revealed significant difference between dynamic and non-dynamic assessment with a statistically significant increase in the reading comprehension scores of the group being assessed dynamically. Similarly, Kozulin and Garb (2004) indicated that dynamic assessment is effective in both improving students' reading ability and understanding about their language learning potential.

Our findings are also similar to those of Pishghadam, Barabadi, and Kamrood (2011). They investigated the different effects of computerized dynamic assessment of reading comprehension on high and low achievers. The results showed that providing mediation in the form of hints contributed significantly to the increase of students' scores. They argued that DA allows for individuals' self-assessment. This makes test takers more involved in learning process and overcome their non-intellective factors such as fear of failure and anxiety by making assessment more learner-friendly.

Here, it is wise to conclude that face-to-face interaction with the mediator made learning process more enjoyable and comfortable. The students might feel less anxious in dynamic assessment sessions in comparison to previously conducted classes and in this way their perceptions of their class, teacher and curriculum changed during these sessions. The new attitude provided them a strong motivation to produce second language. They claimed that they are learning for themselves so there is no need to compare them with others and dynamic assessment sessions provided them this situation appropriately.

By providing the students with the opportunity to take part in mediation sessions, they were able to participate more, ask questions, and hypothesize about

different questions. It seems that offering comprehensible input during these sessions led the participants to exhibit change in their performances.

In contrast to static assessment in which all of the students take part in the same test with the same difficulty level, in dynamic assessment the teacher acts according to each student's ZPD and trainings are based on this ZPD, so every student has the opportunity to develop through these sessions.

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