

An Interactionist Dynamic Assessment of Essay Writing via Google Docs: A Case of Three Iranian EFL University Students

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IJEAP-1810-1289

Abstract

The present case study sought to investigate the application of dynamic assessment to an EFL writing context. It primarily aimed to understand the effectiveness of an interactionist dynamic assessment procedure through a web-based application in enhancing argumentative essay writing skill at the university level. The three participants of the study received mediational interactions in five consecutive sessions in an online environment where they revised their written drafts in a joint activity with the mediator. The analysis of the mediator-learner dyadic interactions uncovered traces of microgenetic development in the learners. Also, checking the frequency distribution of implicit and explicit prompts as well as the degree of learner responsiveness over the sessions showed a substantial change in the degree of autonomy and self-regulation in the learners. Ultimately, the participants were able to successfully transfer the learned materials from DA sessions to the transfer task. The study, after all, proved the efficacy of online interactionist dynamic assessment in the development and self-regulation of learners in argumentative essay writing skill.

Keywords: Interactionist Dynamic Assessment, Argumentative Essay Writing Skill, Google Docs, Mediational Moves, Learner reciprocity

1. Introduction

Generally, assessment and instruction are viewed as two distinct specializations within the field of education, adopting different methods and goals (Bachman, 1990; Shohamy, 1998, 2001; McNamara, 2001). This dualistic view of assessment and instruction represents an orientation toward assessment carried over from standardized tests where testers attempt to control the measurement context to get accurate, uncontaminated information about an individual's ability through his / her solo performance. This implies that all sorts of interactions, feedback and assistance are only characteristics of a good instruction which jeopardize the assessment of true abilities in individuals (Poehner, 2008).

Throughout the history, different conceptualizations have been formed on the relationship between the two practices. From a Vygotskian perspective, however, there should be a monistic relationship between assessment and instruction so as to simultaneously understand and promote development. Rejecting the conventional paradigms of education where assessment was kept separate from teaching activities, Vygotsky called for embedding an intervention within the assessment procedure. This unification is closely linked to his theory of development where he suggested that observation of independent problem solving only reveals the developed cognitive processes. The missing link is information about the abilities that are still in the process of developing, information that can only be obtained through the provision of an assistance in the assessment procedure. This monistic view of assessment and instruction makes it possible to simultaneously understand and develop learners' abilities within the Zone of Proximal Development (Poehner, 2008).

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1.1. Statement of the Problem

In the present researcher's own personal experiences in the area of EFL writing, learners hardly benefit from the red-pen corrections. The perplexing problem, then, existing in almost all writing classrooms is that students do not incorporate the teacher's feedback into their linguistic repertoire. There is also an abundance of evidence in the literature that indicate the existence of such a problem in ESL / EFL writing classrooms. Studies show that writing teachers spend at least 20 to 40 minutes commenting on students' written drafts wondering if at all their students would even bother glancing at the written feedback (Guenette, 2007; Valero et al, 2008). Most writing teachers have even observed that drafts containing their corrections have been thrown into classroom waste basket by the uninterested students who see no use in reading the corrections (Chun-Xian, 2007). This has led some scholars to judge written comments as time-consuming, vague, impractical, unintelligible and of little or no use (Ferris, 2004; Lee, 1997; Truscott, 1996; Zamel, 1985). Yet, the reason why most writing teachers cannot stop devoting time and energy to commenting on students' written drafts might be the fact that most ESL students need to be corrected (Alamis, 2010; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). This made the researcher search for more constructive ways of correcting and commenting on students' written productions. Hence, the present study was carried out to investigate whether a dynamic procedure can be more promising than written correction.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The present research is worth performing for the following reasons. Firstly, the number of papers and books published and international conferences taken place on dynamic assessment or assessment within ZPD over the last decades can testify the importance of the issue. As more studies can refine, revise or extend existing knowledge in the area under investigation, the current study will also contribute to the overall understanding of the field. The findings can affect scholarly research, theory, practice, educational interventions and curricula in general.

Practically, the current study contributes to EFL higher education in Iran in terms of assisting teachers to both capture a complete picture of students' levels of ability and to develop their essay writing skill. The findings will benefit teaching pedagogy considering that writing skill plays an important role in our academic contexts today. The greater demand for students with good writing background justifies the need for more effective, life-changing educational approaches. Practitioners and professional peers can make use of a more ground-breaking approach to provide feedback.

Nonetheless, the contributions of this study are not expected to be exclusive to writing skill and should be of value to other language skills and areas aiming to achieve better learning opportunities. It also highlights the significance of using web technologies in delivering e-feedback to students' written productions. From the perspective of research on assessment, it can highly illuminate the new ways mediation in dynamic assessment can be delivered. Innovations might also come about with regard to new media for teaching and assessment in general. Hence, the information yielded by this research can be beneficial to the improvement of the whole teaching profession. The study will help uncover critical areas in the teaching and assessing of writing.

2. Review of Literature

ZPD is Vygotsky's proposal for diagnostics of development as a two-step process for uncovering the child's actual level of development, which can be observed through unassisted independent functioning as well as his / her proximal level of development, those cognitive maturing functions understood through mediated, assisted activity (Chaiklin, 2003). In education, it began to be applied as a procedure to truly diagnose the ongoing cognitive development in an individual. (Poehner et al, 2014). Poehner (2008) asserts that ZPD is an activity jointly constructed with learners wherein mediators negotiate the tasks with learners. Through this negotiation, learners are offered affordances and carefully observed for the responses they provide so as their development and the degree of their independent functioning are diagnosed. The mediation also functions as an instruction to help learners to move toward more independence and self-regulation.

Haywood and Lidz (2007) describe dynamic assessment as a procedure that includes interaction in the process of assessment and focuses on learners' responsiveness. The goal is moving the learner to a higher level of cognitive functioning through creating ZPD. Poehner (2008) also maintains that DA is not an assessment instrument but an administration procedure and accordingly any assessment can be administered dynamically or statically. In DA, the focus of assessment is on the process rather than on the product of learning. There are several key characteristics for DA outlined by Lidz (1991), Lidz and Elliot (2000) and Lidz and Gindis (2003). These features include an interaction between the mediator and learner, an intervention embedded within an assessment and process-oriented information focusing on learners' responsiveness to intervention. In fact, the cooperative interaction seems to be the defining feature of DA (Lidz, 2002) whereby the assessor actively works with the learner providing assistance on task performance.; assistance that ultimately leads to learning (Feuerstein et al, 2010). Several components are the cornerstones of any dynamic assessment procedure. These are mediation, internalization, transcendence, mediational moves, and Learner Reciprocity.

In dynamic assessment, mediation refers to the reciprocal interaction between a more knowledgeable other (a teacher, a peer) and the learners, taking into account their ZPDs with the goal of providing developmental assistance to promote learning and development. Through this assistance, mediator or a more knowledgeable peer collaborates with the learner to move him / her to the next level of his / her ZPD (Hasan, 2005). Poehner (2008) discusses that a mediator tries to help learners, by probing and hinting, perform a task that they could not perform alone. Poehner and Lantolf (2010) argue that "mediation is not just a matter of offering assistance, but it is a matter of offering appropriate assistance", assistance whose goal is moving learners toward agentive performance and toward transferring the appropriated concepts to future performances. It is not, then, a matter of helping the learner on task completion (p. 316).

In the dialectical process of mediation, the control or regulation dynamically shifts from the mediator to the student. Lantolf and Thorne (2007) see regulation as a form of mediation. These are two stages of regulation in DA. Varying levels of explicit to implicit mediation from the mediator is other-regulation which involves controlling by others. Self-regulation, on the other hand, pertains to learners' ability to perform either without any assistance or with minimal assistance. According to Minick (1987), the goal of any DA procedure is reaching to the point of self-regulation which can only occur through internalization.

In Vygotskian theory, an individual's development occurs on two planes: socially between the individuals and mentally within the individual. The latter intrapsychological process is referred to as internalization. (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). According to Lantolf (2000), internalization occurs when the socially mediated forms of activity are reconstructed on the inner plane; the process which creates higher forms of mentation. This suggests that higher order thinking skills develop when the individual has already appropriated the tools, implying that s/he needs less assistance to complete a task.

Transcendence or transfer is an important component of DA. Feuerstein has rightly addressed this concept in his Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) referring to long-term effects of an interaction beyond the immediate task (Feuerstein et al, 1988). Poehner (2008) writes that the purpose of transcendence in DA is tracing development in learners from one interaction to the next. He (2007) applied the concept of transfer as a process of tracking development in more complex and demanding tasks. The significance of transfer, as he puts it, refers to the change that moves the person beyond the "here-and-now" considerations, extending the scope of abilities to the future. In fact, Transcendence is based on the assumption that mediation is never withdrawn. It helps the mediator in a further discrimination of learners to see whether they can sustain learning in variable contexts on more challenging tasks.

Mediational moves are the strategies or the types of support, explicit or implicit, given to the mediatee to perform better and develop. Although these strategies can vary according to the assessment context, they usually begin with the most implicit feedback and gradually move toward

more explicit assistance. Recording the type and frequency of such moves and strategies made by the mediator during the procedure helps better understand the change occurring to learners in the process. Also, reciprocity means the active participation of the learner in the interactions (Feuerstein et al, 1988). Poehner (2008) argues that two interrelated factors define sensitivity to ZPD. First “every move made by the mediator during DA must be focused on learner development” and second “to successfully co-construct a ZPD, mediators must always be attentive to learners’ reciprocating behaviors (p. 70).”

2.1. *The Domain of Second/Foreign Language Writing*

Various theoretical and methodological orientations have furnished the history on ESL/EFL writing. However, since 1990s, with the application of Vygotsky’s ideas on the social dimension of learning, cognitively-oriented writing and the view of writing as a linear individual product isolated from context were criticized. Vygotsky’s description of composition as a process through which social and cultural interaction lead to the translation of the inner speech to outer speech in the form of writing prevalently changed the global view of writing.

From the sociocultural perspective, second / foreign language writing has been studied in two ways. The first strand of research in writing focuses on the co-construction of text, viewing writing as a cultural practice. This line of research (represented by Ferreira & Lantolf, 2008; Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Kern, 2000; Kramsch, 2000; Lantolf, 2000) also considers the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of writing or the role of identity and culture in the process of writing. Closely linked to SCT, this research perspective rejects the conventional view of language learning isolated from the context of learning (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998). Researchers working within this perspective reject the simplistic view of writing as an exclusively cognitive process and claim that writing is a contextually embedded social and cultural practice (Vollmer, 2002).

The second view is more classroom oriented. Following Vygotskian idea that social interaction is the source of cognitive development, plenty of scholars are interested in exploring how group interactions and dynamics affect writing performance in second / foreign language classrooms (Anton & Dicanilla, 1998; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; 2000; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; 1998). Several studies on second / foreign language writing from the second strand of writing research are thematically enumerated below.

A mixed-method study by Hadidi (2012) examined the microgenetic development of argumentative writing ability in a group of adult pre-university EFL learners based on Toulmin’s model of argumentation. The researcher aimed to improve writing ability and argument quality through cognitive strategy training and teaching of reflective processes within the zone of proximal development. The findings proved that the procedure could help reveal learner abilities better than traditional summative assessments of writing.

Kushki (2012) ran an interactionist dynamic assessment on three sophomore students of English Literature to understand whether a DA procedure could help gain insight into learners' ability more than an assessment of their independent performance. The study also aimed to explore the potentials of DA in promoting learners' ability in the area of foreign language writing as well as the extent to which DA could lead to individualized instruction that is sensitive to learners' ZPD. The study, which was carried out in the course of one month, approved the usefulness of DA in both diagnosing and developing learners' ability in writing skill.

Another qualitative case study was conducted by Rahimi et al (2015) to investigate the effect of an interactionist DA on the development of conceptual L2 writing skill in three advanced EFL students. Analyzing the interactions of the DA tutorial sessions, their study revealed that interactionist DA can have significant diagnostic and developmental benefits in the area of writing.

Drawing on sociocultural theory and genre theory, Shrestha (2013) investigated the transfer of academic writing skills and conceptual knowledge in ESP context. In this small-scale study, three students received an interactive feedback based on the principles of dynamic assessment and one

student underwent traditional form of feedback. She concluded that students who received DA could transfer their academic writing skills and conceptual knowledge better than those receiving traditional non-interactive one.

Many other prominent studies have been conducted on DA including Ableeva (2008), Brown and Ferrara (1985), Campione et al. (1984), Davin (2011), Hassaskhah and Javan Haghparast (2012), Miao and Lv (2013), Nassaji and Swain (2000), Poehner (2005) and Shrestha and Coffin (2012), all of which endorse the positive effects of employing a dynamic procedure in teaching and assessing language skills or components.

2.2. Google Docs

Google Docs is a free web-based word-processing application to create, edit and store documents online. Individuals can share and access the documents from any computer with an internet connection and a Google account. It provides an environment for collaborative projects from geographically diverse locations where individuals can work together on a common task, peer-edit their documents and share them in real time. As documents are stored online, all previous copies can be retained and the revision history can be accessed at any time. Oxnevad (2013) maintains that Google Docs can be used by teachers to provide immediate feedback to the students. This word processing application has all the typing and editing options offered by Microsoft word. However, what makes it unique is that it has the advantage of "sharing" with a group. When a document is created, the creator can send an invitation to anyone who has a Google account to visit the page and give comments or edit the document. Hence, it provides a good opportunity for a group of individuals to see the comments and changes made by the others online.

Various researchers have already used this technological tool in the area of writing. Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014) conducted an experimental study to compare collaborative writing in a face-to-face classroom and in Google Docs in a group of undergraduate students at Bangkok University. Students received constructive feedback on their writings which led to their meaningful revisions of the early drafts. They found that the Google Docs group outperformed the participants in the face-to-face group. In addition, the Google Docs group showed more positive attitudes toward collaboration in writing.

Zhou et al (2012) evaluated the effectiveness of Google Docs in improving collaborative writing activity in a group of students at the University of Georgia. The novelty of this study lies in its application of Google Docs in out-of-class assignments. The researchers explored the potentials of this web 2.0 tool in the enhancement of collaborative writing and its ability to alter the way students communicated and collaborated. The study also reported a positive experience with Google Docs on the part of the students. Yet, the researchers did not observe any substantial gains in the students' posttest scores; a result they mainly attribute to their use of group assessment of students' learning. They claim that individual assessments might change the results to a notable degree.

Skimming through the bulk of research on DA, one can infer that the majority of studies have dealt with the use of either an interventionist or interactionist approach to DA in a specific area or even a minute aspect of language learning via face-to-face mediation. It is only recently that technology-oriented researchers have started to reconsider the medium of delivering mediation in DA. Studies in this regard are not scarce and the two main waves are recognizably computerized DA and web-based DA. Yet, in neither of these two ways of procedurizing DA, the on-line mediation was realized out of classroom site, uncovering a gap in the literature. Besides, those employing a web-based procedure are phenomenological in nature focusing on learner perspectives and experiences. The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to deliver interactionist mediations through a web-based application.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Participants

The present study utilized a case study approach to obtain an understanding of the microgenetic development of essay writing ability in the participants of the study. Three sophomore university students, two male and one female, from an essay writing class of the Azad University of Bandar Abbas were selected through purposive sampling for the purpose of this study. The selection was made based on the participants' access to a broadband connection to the Internet at their place. The participants had only received prior instruction on writing in the course Advanced Grammar wherein they learned how to write English paragraphs.

3.2. Materials

The textbook used for the essay writing course of the present study was *Steps to Writing: With Additional Readings* (eighth edition, 2011) by Jean Wyrick. The researcher / teacher did not go through the whole book; several sections of the book only accompanied the teacher's instruction on the argumentative essay writing.

The following inventories were adapted from Poehner's (2008) typology of mediational moves and learner reciprocity, thematically developed from his interactions with L2 French learners of English. As Poehner's study targeted learners' use of past tense in oral narration, a few of the categories were slightly changed to adjust the purpose of the present study. A final review of the interactional dyads proved that the type of moves and behaviors made in the current study, matched the categories in Poehner's study.

Table1: Mediational Moves (adapted from Poehner, 2005, p. 160)

1. Request for reviewing the sentence containing the error
2. Highlighting the site of error
3. Specifying the error
4. Request for clarification / explanation / translation
5. Request for self-correction
6. Offering a choice/providing explanation
7. Accepting the response
8. Rejecting the response
9. Providing the response
10. Providing a metalinguistic explanation

Table 2: Learner Reciprocity Moves (adapted from Poehner, 2005, p. 183)

1. Unresponsive
2. Responding incorrectly
3. Responding correctly
4. Requesting explanation
5. Offering explanation
6. Understanding explanation
7. Accepting the correct form

3.3. Instruments

The following instruments were used in the present study:

Table 3: Argumentation Style 1 (Wyrick, 2011, p. 291)

Introduction	Motivator Thesis statement Blueprint
First central	Pro 1
Second central	Pro 2
Third central	Pro 3
Conclusion	Reworded thesis statement Clincher

Table 4: Argumentation Style 2 (Wyrick, 2011, p. 291)

Introduction	Motivator Thesis statement Blueprint
First central	Pro 1
Second central	Pro 2
Third central	Con(s) + refutation
Conclusion	Reworded thesis statement Clincher

3.4. Procedure of the Study

At the outset of the study, the participants received instruction on argumentative essays in their writing class, the way they are written and the elements included in each single paragraph of such essays. This was done going through the related chapters of their textbook. Various samples of essays were then practiced to help learners realize how to write an acceptable argumentative essay. Then, the participants were asked to write their first essay without receiving any interaction with the mediator. This independent performance provided the mediator with an insight into learners' current level of ability, their potentially problematic areas and helped her identify their zone of actual development (ZAD). Also, it was a starting point to commence mediation. Following that, individualized dialogic interactions (additional to the routine class hour) were established with the participants through Google Docs, targeting errors on argumentation, grammar and vocabulary. The reason why this research, contrary to the existing research on dynamic assessment, had a broad scope in mediation and did not target specific focal points was because the research was part of the participants' regular schedule and the teacher as researcher had to work on all the three areas in essay writing. Hence, the results could be used in and generalized to the real writing classes.

The DA approach utilized in this study was interactionist as it attempted to deliver individual mediation adjusted to learner needs. The reason why an interactionist approach was utilized in the present study was because by negotiating mediation with each learner individually, more appropriate assistance could be provided. Also, this approach is more in line with Vygotsky's emphasis on a qualitative approach to understand and promote development which entails individual collaborative interaction. Mediations aimed to provide the students with sufficient support to both uncover their potential level of development and further develop their skills in writing. Individualized mediation was delivered through Google Docs. As the participants were supposed to receive mediation through a web-based application, the researcher first provided them with instructions on how to use the application. For the mediation, Options and accessories provided by the Google Docs were used for the mediator's commenting and mediatee's editing activities. All the mediational activities were carried out in the written form through a dialogue chat box in the application. The implicit hints and prompts included request for reviewing the whole paragraph and highlighting or underlining the

whole sentence. For explicit hints, the metalinguistic explanation was provided either through Google Docs or materials with an adequate focus on the addressed areas were e-mailed to the student after the mediation. The application made it possible for the mediator/learners to retain a history of all previous drafts which not only assisted the mediator in her future analyses but also helped learners to observe their own progress. No mediation was provided to the participants inside the classroom and the participants were physically away from the researcher while receiving online mediation.

When encountered with an erroneous point in the draft, the mediator began her mediation with the most implicit hints (such as highlighting or underlining the whole sentence containing the error) assisting and scaffolding the mediatee to spot the error and correct it for himself/herself. Success in self-correction on the part of the mediatee ended the mediation at this point; whereas failure in self-correction showed that the mediator should make use of less implicit hints and prompts. Unable to respond to less implicit hints, the learners gradually received less explicit feedback. Finally, scaffolding terminated when the mediatee was provided with a metalinguistic explanation, the correct form and further instructional materials focusing on the area of mistake. The process continued until the draft was revised through a joint attempt of the mediator and the mediatee.

DA sessions were held on a weekly basis for a period of 5 weeks each lasting 20-50 minutes for each learner depending on the needs of the mediatee. Totally, in the course of research, the participants had five writing tasks to be written in argumentation style 1 followed by five related DA sessions and one TR task to be written in argumentation style 2. The purpose of TR task was to check if learners could successfully transfer what they learned through mediations to a new more challenging context. To ensure comprehension as well as to create an affectively safe atmosphere for the struggling learners to express themselves, the mediator switched to Farsi now and then judiciously to help interactions advance. The learners did not receive any mediation for the TR task. As for the data analysis phase, the written form of mediational interactions between the mediator and the learners were saved for the future scrutiny of the traces of microgenetic development or instances of improvement in essay writing ability in particular. The DA sessions were only designed to supplement the regular essay writing schedule of the participants of the study and the other class members did not enjoy any negotiations or mediations.

4. Results

Profiling microgenetic growth in the three participants included three steps. Firstly, a detailed description of the negotiations across the sessions was carried out to see if learners' control over argumentation, structure and vocabulary had improved as a result of the mediator's dialogic assistance. Then, a frequency count of implicit and explicit prompts each learner received as well as the degree of their responsiveness to mediations, helped the researcher to better understand the improvement occurred over the DA sessions. Also, the TR task was examined for traces of development with regard to the previous problematic areas or the points they received mediation on in the DA sessions.

4.1. Analysis of Dyads, Frequency of Moves and TR Task

The following excerpts are only instances of dialogic interactions or the researcher-participant dyads of the three participants analyzed to find traces of microgenetic development which is ensured by comparing both the quality and quantity of assistance the learners received within one session as well as across the sessions. The learners were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

4.1.1. The case of Mina

Instances of problem and negotiations

Episode 1, session 1 (21 minutes)

- M (mediator): Could you review the whole introduction paragraph and find the problem?
- L (learner): I think my motivator is wrong.

- M: What's wrong about it?
- L: It is long!
- M: Actually the problem is not the length. (Highlighting the blueprints).
- L: I've tried to name the positive influences of education in the blueprints.
- M: But you have mentioned three age groups who are influenced by education not three specific benefits of education!
- L: So, I should revise my blueprints. (After several minutes) *Education can help people to have good jobs in future and have more money, people can have much knowledge and also social class.*
- M: You have mentioned good points but they are not structurally parallel.
- L: You mean there are grammatical mistakes?
- M: There is one mistake but I mean the type of structure you have used for each blueprint is not the same.
- L: I don't understand!
- M: There are two sentences, with unequal length, and one noun phrase. You have to use the same structure for all the items, for instance three noun phrases.
- L: (After several minutes) *Better job and money, better knowledge and better social class.*
- M: Good.
- L: Thanks.
- M: How about your grammatical mistakes?...

Evidently, the learner needed a substantial number of prompts to understand the problem related to the organization of her introduction paragraph. She was not very responsive, even to explicit hints, and was only able to correct one mistake related to the blueprints, being unable to correct other grammatical mistakes including the use of much. However, she managed to organize an acceptable introduction paragraph in the second DA session.

Episode 2, session 2 (18 minutes)

- M: Highlighting unfortunately, children don't have enough knowledge about healthy foods and attract to eat fast food. These foods don't have any healthy value and just make people fat. After eat these foods children become sick.
- L: don't have enough knowledge?
- M: No, take your time.
- L: (After a couple of minutes) I don't know.
- M: Underlining attract.
- L: I should write attracted
- M: No.
- L: Sorry
- M: What kind of structure do we have here?
- L: Silence.
- M: Is the structure passive or active?
- L: Passive? No active.
- M: We should say are attracted (Metalinguistic explanation was provided). Ok, there is another mistake. Could you find the mistake? ...

The learner shows a complete reliance on the mediator to spot the errors. Although she could finally correct the errors after receiving explicit prompts, she failed to identify her mistake related to passive / active structures, leading to the most explicit prompt by the mediator. Mediations, then, continued on her other mistakes related to using demonstrative pronouns (this, that, these, those) and using gerunds after prepositions. In task 3, Mina demonstrated signs of internalization of using a gerund after a preposition. However, no use of passive structures or demonstrative pronouns was

observed in her subsequent essays. It is not clear whether she intentionally avoided using these structures or she had learned the structures but she didn't need to use them in her essays.

Episode 3, session 5 (9 minutes)

- M: Review the red area and see if there is any mistake:
- L: Give them.
- M: Good. Can you explain the problem?
- L: Yes, I used third person for plural nouns.
- M: Good. Highlighting It's not a good idea to make them isolate and put them at the corner of a room to write books.
- L: Isolation? Oh no isolated.
- M: Very good...

It can be seen that she was able to find and correct most of the errors right after an implicit hint in session 5. This is obviously a sign of her improvement as compared to her responsiveness in sessions 1 and 2; though her problems related to third person singular still existed.

Distribution of main moves

Table 5: Mina's Developmental Profile

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
1. Total number of errors	17	19	13	7	4
2. Mediator's highlighting the site of error	17	17	11	6	2
3. Mediator's specifying the error	17	16	8	4	1
4. Mediator's providing the response	16	14	7	3	1
5. Learner's unresponsiveness	7	6	3	2	1

From the table it is clear that although Mina's errors minimally increased in session 2, they then noticeably decreased in session 5 as compared to session 1. Also, she gradually required less assistance toward the end of the research to find and correct the errors, receiving even less explicit hints from the mediator in the subsequent sessions. Decrease in the number of mediator-corrected errors, too, signals that the control gradually shifted from the mediator to the learner. The final point of her development has to do with the degree of responsiveness. It can be rightly concluded that she moved toward more agentive performance during the DA sessions.

Signs of internalization in TR task

Men and women have to work for the cost of their life and I think it is better these job opportunities to be equal.

Some people think if we give this chance to women, men lose their job and they get depression because they are the main part of life.

Also, if all jobs are shared between men and women, some men should stay at home and this is a problem because it is their duty to work and earn money.

Sometimes, there are more chances for women to get a job because they don't require much money as salary.

4.1.2. The case of Amir

Instances of Problem and Negotiations

Episode 1, session 1 (27 minutes)

- M: Please read the introduction paragraph and find the problem:
- L: Are there grammatical mistakes?
- M: The main problem is related to the organization of your paragraph.
- L: Is it wrong?
- M: What are the elements of an introduction paragraph?
- L: Motivator, thesis and blueprints.
- M: Good, do you think you have written good motivator, thesis and blueprints?
- L: Underlining *Education is a formal learning in a school, university or other places. It has also a very important role in people's life.* This is my motivator. Is it wrong? I can't understand!
- M: You have written two disconnected sentences as your motivator. Can you revise it?
- L: *Education has an important role in people's life. It has also a lot of benefits for them.*
- M: The first sentence is ok but the second is in fact your thesis. Keep this for the thesis and write a more general sentence for the motivator.
- L: *It is very necessary for them.*
- M: Not bad.

Although the learner had learned what elements to write in an introduction paragraph, he could not write these acceptably. He could finally revise them with the explicit help of the mediator. In the rest of this dialogue, the mediator presented a considerable number of explicit prompts to help him revise his central paragraphs too. This signifies that he was really reliant on the mediator to realize and overcome the errors. The next episode shows how this reliance decreased in the subsequent session. While he was able to write an acceptable introduction paragraph in the second essay, his grammatical mistakes still persisted.

Episode 2, session 2 (11 minutes)

- M: Could you review the introduction paragraph and see if there are any problems?
- L: There are no doubt?
- M: So, what's wrong with it?
- L: I should say There is.
- M: Yes, what else? ...

Upon receiving a couple of hints from the mediator, the learner was able to spot and correct the mistakes. None of the mistakes were explicitly corrected by the mediator. He showed a good degree of improvement in his response to mediations and self-correcting the errors in the subsequent DA sessions.

Distribution of main moves

Table 6: Amir's Developmental Profile

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
1. Total number of errors	15	10	8	3	3
2. Mediator's highlighting the site of error	14	8	7	1	1
3. Mediator's specifying the error	11	7	4	1	1
4. Mediator's providing the response	11	7	3	1	0
5. Learner's unresponsiveness	2	2	0	0	0

The table reveals that Amir gradually made less errors in his writing tasks during the DA procedure. Comparing the number of implicit and explicit hints he received, it can be observed that less explicit hints were used for him each session as well as across the sessions indicating his improvement in appropriating the mediations. Furthermore, the number of mediator-corrected errors considerably dropped for him, which is another sign of development. He also reached the point of self-regulation as he became less unresponsive toward the end of the course of research.

Signs of internalization in TR task

There are many job opportunities for both men and women but the skills are different for them.

There are people who still are thinking traditional and believe that women should not appear in society.

There is no difference between men and women so why we prevent women to do jobs that they are interested.

One of the advantages is that when women have income they can help their husbands in expenditure of life or spend it for their children.

4.1.3. The Case of Hessam

Instances of Problem and Negotiations

Episode 1, session 1 (17 minutes)

- M: Highlighting the sentence. *It has many benefits and that is other reason for people to educate.*
- L: Is *that* wrong?
- M: No, *that* is ok.
- L: The verb is wrong?
- M: No. (Underlining *other reason*)
- L: I meant *yeki digeh* (another).
- M: Yes, I got the meaning. There is a grammatical problem.
- L: I don't know.
- M: There is something extra here.
- L: Silence....Is it *other*?
- M: Yes, what is the correct form?
- L: Long silence.
- M: *Another reason*. Metalinguistic explanation was provided on the difference between *other*, *another*, *the other* and *the others*.

Several levels of prompt were used to help the learner come up with the location of the error. Although she finally discovered the error, she was unable to make it correct.

Episode 2, session 1 (9 minutes)

- M: Highlighting *By going to school and continue it, they can have a good job in future*
- L: *It*? Should I say *that* instead of *it*?
- M: No! Think again.
- L: Meaning is problem?
- M: No, underlining *continue*.
- L: Should I write something else?
- M: Like what?
- L: *Ing, continuing*?
- M: Why?

- L: Because it should be estemrari? (Progressive)
- M: Yes. Metalinguistic explanation.

The mediator provided Hessam with a range of hints until he could recognize the incorrect form and overcome it; though not realizing the reason for using it. In task 3, Hessam showed that he learned to correctly use parallel structures before and after *and*.

Episode 3, session 5 (24 minutes)

- M: Can you find another mistake here?
- L: (Typing) *Their knowledge* is ok, *one of the students* is ok, *wants* is ok....is he / she wrong?
- M: Yes.
- L: What should I use?
- M: Do you need object pronouns or subject pronouns?
- L: Object.
- M: What are these?
- L: I think subject. I have to use *her / him*.
- M: Yes good.
- M: Highlighting *But robots doesn't have any sensation, they only teach. So certainly, classes will become a boring class.*
- L: *Doesn't* is wrong.
- M: What should it be?
- L: *Don't*.
- M: Yes.
- M: Highlighting *Most of people think using robots instead of human teachers are interesting and better because it causes to decrease students' stress. But I think this reasons are not good.*
- L: *Is*. Not *are*.
- M: Yes. What else? Any other mistakes?
- L: *This reasons* should be *these reasons*.
- M: Yes good.

In the final DA session, Hessam needed fewer prompts to locate the errors and correct them. Comparing his initial negotiations with the final ones, it can be noticed that he gradually needed less support to correct the mistakes, which signals his microgenetic growth.

Distribution of main moves

Table 7: Hessam's Developmental Profile

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
1. Total number of errors	12	10	7	6	4
2. Mediator's highlighting the site of error	12	10	6	4	2
3. Mediator's specifying the error	11	7	4	3	1
4. Mediator's providing the response	10	6	3	3	1
5. Learner's unresponsiveness	3	2	1	1	0

Hessam's development can be well tracked by considering the reduction in the total number of errors he made, his needing less explicit mediation from one session to the next and his improvement in responding positively to the mediations. This shows that Hessam could successfully move from a stage of other regulation to autonomy and internalization. Signs of Internalization in TR Task are discussed below.

Another reason and the most important reason for me is equality of men and women. Why can't women have a job like men?

Some men are unemployed so they can't support their family and they don't have enough money for living.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The qualitative analyses entailed a careful examination of the negotiations between the mediator and learners looking for evidences of improvement in learners' performance. Feasibly, only some instances of the interactional dyads were brought to readers' attention; though all other dyads were reviewed by the researcher for an accurate judgment. The analyses revealed a smooth trend of microgenetic development in the learners as they gradually became more responsive, they corrected more errors with less explicit hints and they generally required less assistance and less mediation to revise their drafts as they approached the end of the course of DA procedure. This approves that DA can have positive impact on learners' ability to write argumentative essays. While variations were observed in the learners' level of response, the amount of assistance needed and their level of internalization over the sessions, overall, all learners showed a positive developmental trend from the beginning sessions to the final one. The differential responsiveness to mediation could be related to the different distances that different learners need to traverse on their way toward self-regulation and independence. Also, there were instances where some learners performed worse in a couple of subsequent sessions but then regained their prior state of functioning. This can be linked to the concept of regression in Vygotsky's ideas who argued that 'development in education is not linear but spiral'. In fact, learners' progress toward a higher level of understanding is not continual and they sometimes experience a certain type of regression (Van Der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, p. 309). Also as Zebroski (1994) puts it, the model of development proposed by Vygotsky is simultaneously progressive and regressive.

Although learners were required to write their TR task in a different style from the previous five writing tasks, they did not encounter any specific problem with regard to the organization of the essay. However, their essays included a few errors related to prepositions, parts of speech and vocabulary, a problem which might have been overcome had the DA procedure extended. Admittedly, lexical mistakes relate to a broader category than structure and organization of essay and can hardly be overcome through negotiations. After all, in line with studies by Ableeva (2008), Brown and Ferrara (1985), Campione et al. (1984), Davin (2011), Poehner (2005) and Shrestha (2013), to name only a few pioneering ones, the findings of this study expectedly demonstrated that the participants have effectively transferred the learned materials from the DA sessions to the transfer task.

The analysis of mediational moves used in DA sessions demonstrated that more explicit prompts were utilized in session 1. In the same vein, the delivered mediation in session 5 was mainly of implicit nature. Favorably, the total number of errors made as well as the number of correct forms provided by the mediator noticeably dropped in session 5 compared with session 1, supporting the fact that the participants became more responsive to mediation. Although the mediational moves did not drastically change in quantity, their comparative qualitative change during the whole procedure is an indication of growth in learners. This general shift over time in the number of explicit clues provided by the mediator can signify learners' self-regulation and development. An important point for discussion here is that the observed changes including the observed reduction in the total number of mediational moves, the number of errors committed as well as the number of explicit hints can be considered as rewarding concerning the short time span of the present research. As DA procedures inherently need more time investments, higher growth could have occurred if the procedure was longitudinal. Also, the scrutiny provided more evidence for the learners' improvement in the degree of responsiveness to mediation and their overall development since it was observed that they were substantially less unresponsive toward the end of the procedure. That they needed less assistance to correct the errors they made in their essays represents a gradual and of course a significant improvement. At the end of the procedure, more instances of learners' autonomy were observed as

they attempted more self-initiated revisions and self-corrected errors showing their incorporating the mediations in the linguistic repertoire.

Accordingly, the findings are consistent with the results of studies by Hadidi (2012), Hassaskhah and Javan Haghparast (2012), Kushki (2012), Miao and Lv (2013), Nassaji and Swain (2000), Rahimi et al. (2015), Shrestha (2013), Shrestha and Coffin (2012), and many others who came to realize that dynamic assessment can contribute substantially to microgenetic development in learners' writing ability. All in all, in accordance with the robust literature on the implementation of dynamic assessment, the present study found that establishing individual dialogic interactions and supportive negotiations with learners in the form of interactionist dynamic assessment can yield fruitful results in the area of foreign language writing. Significant growth was observed in the participants' performance and the amount of mediation given to the participants substantially reduced across the sessions throughout the DA intervention. More specifically, the study notified us that mediating learners on how to revise their argumentative essays helped them identify and overcome their mistakes more efficiently and improve their overall level of functioning. The dynamic procedure employed in this study helped the learners develop the ability to internalize the learned concepts and structures and reach the point of self-regulation needing less assistance from the mediator and finally it led to the transcendence of learning from the DA sessions to more novel and complex contexts. At the same time, the study highlighted that DA can be practiced through other delivery modes if time and space limitations of educational borders do not allow for its realization in the classroom; other modes and media can be equally promising. This is particularly helpful for writing teachers who often argue against dynamic feedback criticizing its feasibility in educational settings.

In sum, it deserves reiteration that following DA principles, it is possible to nurture learners' ability to better internalize what they receive from the teacher as feedback and further develop in writing skill. Definitely, a DA-based instruction can bring about many benefits for classroom praxis. In addition to its priority over the conventional forms of assessment in uncovering a range of abilities in learners, dynamic assessment is an appropriate form of feedback that can facilitate successful writing at the university level. Hence, writing teachers must be aware that providing written comments and feedback may not guarantee positive changes in the quality of learners' writing. If consciousness-raising is a facilitative aspect of language learning, then a dynamic way of feedback provision can better make learners aware of their problems and eventually empower them to overcome those problems. Yet, the realization of dynamic assessment might not be a straightforward endeavor as we have just stepped into this domain. An assessment of the resources and a consideration of the particularities of each context remains to be done by teachers before embarking on its implementation.

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