

Implications of Dynamic Assessment in Second/Foreign Language Contexts

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Abstract

Dynamic assessment has attracted a lot of attention. Many authors have suggested that dynamic assessment should be used instead of standardized tests, while others thought that dynamic assessment is a complementary assessment, and it should be used with other kinds of assessments. Therefore, the present paper aims to bring to the fore some important issues in dynamic assessment, different models of dynamic assessment and compares them with non-dynamic assessment. Advantages and disadvantages of dynamic assessment would also be reviewed in this paper. Interactionist and interventionist models of dynamic assessment would be presented. It also considered applying assessment in order to learn and explain the aim of assessment. Considering dynamic assessment, it would nominate zone of proximal development and sociocultural theory, and how these two are used while the teacher is applying dynamic assessment. Finally, the present paper provides some implications to implement dynamic assessment in our classes.

Keywords: Dynamic assessment, Non-dynamic assessment, Zone of proximal development, Interactionist and Interventionist DA

1. Introduction

One of the important objects that can motivate students' learning is assessment. Assessment shows the level of knowledge that has been acquired by students. In module descriptors, the most important part is the way knowledge will be measured. Well-timed and well-designed assessments have wonderful power on students' learning. Early assessment is also a useful act in education because it encourages students and lets them know about their progress. Moreover, it is a good tool for lecturers to find whether their approach is useful or not and helps them to find students' mistakes and tells them how to correct them (Murphy, 2009).

There are many different types of assessments including open book exams, oral exams, reports, thesis defense sessions, and students' self-assessment each of which has advantages and disadvantages. For instance, the chance of cheating is low in exams, but they usually test the ability of memorizing instead of understanding. Open book exams are also another type of assessment that causes less stress for memorizing material, but some students may not have access to the books required for the test. Another type of assessment can be oral exams which have a high degree of authenticity, but these kinds of exams can only deal with a narrow range of skills. Thesis defense session is an individual work and allows the student to demonstrate their understanding, but thesis assessment may take a long time. The other type of assessment is called self-assessment. This type of assessment let students study independently, but they may face difficulty in understanding. Now this paper attempted to introduce and discuss Dynamic Assessment, its models, advantages and disadvantages (Murphy, 2009).

Dynamic assessment is a rather comprehensive type of assessing learners' performance which is based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) model. DA integrates teaching and testing and makes a unified task which contributes to students' final development (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). In contrast to traditional assessment which is called non-dynamic assessment (NDA), DA gives the examiners a very crucial role since they not only have a neutral role, but also they have to create positive relationship with the examinees. Two models of DA, Feuerstein's interactionist model, and Brown's interventionist model, were proposed which will be elaborated in details in the following sections.

2. Review of the Literature

Generally, dynamic assessment is based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978, 1986) of mind that offers cognitive development that can be understood in its social and cultural contexts. It claims that each learner needs someone's help to do a special task so that he or she can perform it independently (Naeini & Duvall, 2012).

2.1 Applying Assessment to Assist Learning

Educational assessment follows activities which are meaningful, contextual, and purposeful. Moreover, it tries to illustrate what a student knows and what he or she can achieve to perform. It is better to say that there is a relationship between what a student knows and what he or she tries to do independently. This gap is named Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Vygotsky. Furthermore, there is a sociocultural theory (SCT) that can be in the level of theories of language which are communicative and cognitive that lead development (Naeini & Duvall, 2012).

Sociocultural theory (SCT) is a new theory in psychology which considers significant contributions that society makes to individuals' development. This theory puts premium upon the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live. This theory emerged from Vygotsky's (1986) viewpoint. He believes that parents, caregivers, peers and culture are responsible for the development of higher order functions. This idea is on the basis of different ways of interacting with people and the culture that they live in which is responsible to shape people's mental abilities. Vygotsky proposes this theory to find a solution to educational and social problems of the time. Sociocultural theory focuses on how adults and peers influence individual learning, and also it puts emphasis on how cultural beliefs and tendencies impact how instruction and learning take place. According to Vygotsky's findings, each function in child's cultural development appears in two steps: First on social level, and second on individual level. Its first step is between people (interpsychological), and the second step is inside the child (intrapyschological). Applicability of these two steps is voluntary attention, logical memory and the formation of concepts. All higher functions emerge from actual relationships between individuals (Shaffer, 2009). These functions occur when a student and a more knowledgeable person are trying to help the learner to move him or her one step forward to a solution. In these situations, a more knowledgeable person attempts to help the learner by paying attention to his or her Zone of Proximal Development (Naeini & Duvall, 2012).

2.2 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

L.S. Vygotsky in the early 1930s proposed the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) the last two years of his life. Following Ableeva (2010), during (1932-1934), Vygotsky's interests in research put an emphasis on formulating and understanding of children's intellectual development. In the early 1930s, Vygotsky attended the revolutionary school reform. In the course of his reform activities, he proposed ZPD. According to Vygotsky, the development of a child involves the active collaboration of human cultural experience with adults and includes two levels; that is, actual level and potential level of development. The actual level reveals the independent performance of the task which is without the help of others and is in line with the zone of actual development. The potential level of development reveals adult-child collaboration in performing the task. Simply put, activating the potential level needs scaffolding of others. These learning activities are supposed to clarify the child's abilities that are in the process of maturation. The potential level is in line with the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky's main purpose is to keep students in their ZPDs level which means that first the student should try to learn something by his own abilities and without help of any other person, and then if he needs help, he can work with a competent peer or a teacher or an adult to complete the task. Continuing this manner may raise learners' ZPD, so they can become ready for more difficult tasks (Ajideh & Nourdad, 2012).

2.3 Dynamic Assessment

Dynamic assessment is based on Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) viewpoint. It is a new kind of assessment which can measure the ability of individual students while answering tests. The difference between dynamic assessment and non-dynamic assessment is that non-dynamic assessment can only demonstrate the already existent abilities of the learner. A significant advantage of dynamic assessment is recommended on the basis of developmental potential that is not manifested by non-dynamic assessment. Dynamic assessment instructs learners how to do the given tasks and help them how to master them. Then their progress will be evaluated (Ajideh & Nourdad, 2012).

Lantolf and Poehner (2004) define dynamic assessment as a method that completes assessment and instruction into a seamless and unified activity. The goal of this approach is to increase learner's development by appropriating forms of mediation sensitive to the individual's current abilities. Haywood and Lidz (2007) find that dynamic assessment is not just the only procedure of assessment. Yet, it is among many different methods of evaluation and assessment

which have tried to move from traditional assessment (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009). Haywood and Lidz (2007, p.1) defines this approach to assessment as follows: “an interactive approach to conducting assessments within the domains of psychology, speech/language, or education that focuses on the ability of the learner to respond to intervention.” They believe that the distinctive feature of DA is an active intervention provided by the mediator during the testing process and the assessment of examinees' responsiveness to the intervention. According to Tzurriel (2001), the most important idea in DA is to apply the change criteria within the testing situation as predictors of future cognitive and developmental performance. The assumption underlying change criteria is that they are closely related to the teaching processes. The mediational strategies used within the DA procedure are in line with learning processes and therefore give better demonstration of changes and future developments. A teacher scaffolds a learner by providing mediation and the learner is responsible to react to this mediation and consequently, the learner is engaged in the learning process and this engagement foster development.

Dynamic assessment has some general characteristics:

- 1) Managing according to test intervention-retest format;
- 2) Being related to the learner's modification of test intervention-retest aspect of dynamic assessment;
- 3) Producing information for developing interventions (Ajideh & Nourdad, 2012, 105).

2.3.1 Applicability of Dynamic Assessment

Many authors have suggested that dynamic assessment should be used instead of standardized tests, but others stipulate that dynamic assessment is a complementary assessment, and it should be used with other kinds of assessments like standardized testing, social and developmental history taking, observation of performance in learning situations, and data gathered from clinical interview, parents, teachers, and others. Authors have suggested DA because it can give us some useful information about present tense and potential performance that is not readily acquirable from other sources. Moreover, this method is useful when students are faced with apparent mental retardation, learning disability, emotional disturbance, personality disorder, or motivational deficit or when scores are low. The other situation that DA can become useful is when teacher is faced with language problems like impoverished vocabulary, differences between the maternal language and the language of the school or delays in language development (Murphy, 2009).

2.3.2 Which Model of Dynamic Assessment?

Dynamic assessment has many different approaches, but they differ in how they approach mediation. Mediation is something similar to interposition. Dynamic assessment leads to mediation to help learners to reconsider the problems and also think through them. It enables the mediator to recognize the level of learners' understanding to relevant linguistic features. Its emphasis is on instruction. The results of individualized view of dynamic assessment toward instruction and assessment are interventionist within the assessment procedure. In this regard, individual differences are identified, and appropriate actions are taken for each learner based on his or her own ZPD (Ajideh & Nourdad, 2012). During mediation, the role of the mediator is to comfort consensus-building discussion. Mediator must not arbitrate disputes. This paper has represented two models of DA which are as follows:

2.3.2.1 Feuerstein's Interactionist Model

Feuerstein model integrates assessment and instruction and they cannot appear separately. This model claims that human cognitive abilities are not fixed, and they can be classified through interventions. Cultural differences are one of the most concerns in this model of assessment. In fact, in this model, the stimulus-response model is changed. It means that the child is interacting with a more competent peer; he or she would help the child in selecting, changing, amplifying, and interpreting the objects with the child through mediations (Naeini & Duvall, 2012).

2.3.2.2 Brown's Interventionist Model

This model is constructed on the basis of the number of prompts that is needed to extract a desired response. Student's learning potential is evaluated by the number of prompts needed to get the goal. Feuerstein's model is different from this model because in this model of dynamic assessment mediation is ordered from most implicit to most explicit and culminates in a correct answer (Naeini & Duvall, 2012).

In addition to the models mentioned above, two formats have been considered for dynamic assessment which will be discussed in the following.

2.3.3 The Sandwich and Cake Format

The sandwich format is more likely to traditional research design in which a pretest is given to the participants to measure their level of knowledge about the topic of the research and then a posttest is implemented to reveal the efficacy of treatment; therefore, the administration of mediation process is through "sandwiching" it between pretest and posttest which themselves are implemented non-dynamically (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). On the other hand, in the cake or layer-cake format, the examiner is a mediator, which means that the examinees are offered instructions which are formed in a pre-fabricated list of notes and comments when a problem is raised. Since "the successive hints are presented like successive layers of icing on a cake [and] the number of hints varies across examinees, but not the content of them" (Sternberg & Grigorenko 2002, p.27), this DA orientation is called layer-cake format.

2.3.4 Dynamic Assessment versus Non-Dynamic Assessment

In this case, dynamic assessment can be identified as the results of a special type of intervention in which the examiner explains to the learners how to cope better with individual tasks, and the score might demonstrate the differences between pretest (before learning) and posttest (after learning) scores. Dynamic assessment concentrates on learner's emergent ability, and it is also inseparable from instruction. On the other hand, non-dynamic assessment measures abilities in the current state. Dynamic assessment can be discerned from non-dynamic assessment in three ways:

- 1) Concentrating of non-dynamic assessment is on the products formed as a result of preexisting skills;
- 2) Not permitting of non-dynamic assessment feedback which is from examiner to the examinee regarding quality of performance' during the test procedure;
- 3) Being as neutral and as uninvolved as possible toward the examinee (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009, p. 190).

A number of researchers compared traditional assessment and dynamic assessment. Dynamic assessment has been considered in different ways such as: learning potential assessment, mediated learning experience, testing-the-limits procedures, mediated assessment and graduated prompts. DA is something different from traditional assessment because it emphasizes the process rather than product. In traditional assessment, the examiner has a neutral role, but in DA the examiner tries to make a good relationship with students in order to increase the level of their learning. Ratiocinators of DA believe that DA is on the basis of often ignored link between assessment and intervention by evaluating both the process and product of students' learning. For instance, suppose a child with no background knowledge versus a trained child. Both of them come to the kindergarten, but the one who has no background knowledge may get a low score on traditional assessment and if they work on intelligence, behavioral maturity, and motivation necessary for learning, that child will get high score in DA. Low scores on traditional assessment or DA may cause school failure on students (Caffrey, 2006).

2.3.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Dynamic Assessment

Dynamic assessment has some advantages and disadvantages which are as follows:

Advantages:

- 1) Dynamic assessment is a link between assessment and intervention.
- 2) It can gather data about children's learning potential.
- 3) It is sensitive to progress.
- 4) It has the ability to include adaptations and accommodations.

Disadvantages:

- 1) Dynamic assessment reduces efficiency.
- 2) It requires experience and expertise.
- 3) It limits practicality (Losardo & Notari-Syverson, 2001, P.4).

2.3.6 Interactionist and Interventionist DA

Interactionist and interventionist are two kinds of mediation in DA field. The former follows Vygotsky's preference for cooperative dialoging. The most significant factor in this approach is that assistance emerges from the interaction between the mediator and the learner, and is therefore highly sensitive to the learner's ZPD while the latter keeps the faith to stay closer to certain forms of static assessment and their concerns over the psychometric properties of their procedures. This type of DA uses standardized administration procedures and forms of assistance

to produce easily quantifiable outcomes that can be used to create comparisons between groups. Then, it should be contrasted with other evaluations to create predictions about performance on future tests. In contrast, interactionist DA concentrates on development of an individual learner or a group of learners, with regard to endeavor required without concern for predetermined endpoints (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009).

2.4 Applications of Dynamic Assessment in L2 Context

2.4.1 Interventionist Approaches to L2 DA

Dynamic assessment has been applied to the second language learning situations in just few years. Schneider and Ganschow (2000) claim that, dynamic assessment is related to the instruction of students who are experiencing foreign language learning problems. They also believed that teacher or student interaction is a way to teach and assess students' awareness of metalinguistic skills. In this surface items are stated in a sequence of increasing complexity. The assumption is that students are not able to move to more complex items until they have mastered the principles underlying simpler problems. That is why they are provided with immediate implicit or explicit feedback as needed until they are able to respond appropriately to an item. Kozulin and Garb (2002) claimed that dynamic assessment procedures are so applicable and effective in the assessment of cognitive performance and it is also useful in other areas as well, such as the EFL context (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009).

2.4.2 Interactionist Approaches to L2 DA

Schneider and Ganschow (2000) contemplated that potential of dynamic assessment can help foreign language learners, especially those with problems arising from dyslexia. They suggested using dynamic assessment procedures to help at-risk language learners expand metalinguistic knowledge because they have believed that it will facilitate their learning. Antón (2003) found about administration of dynamic assessment on placement procedure in a Spanish foreign language program. Students placed into courses to receive instruction more attuned to their ZPD. Those who could correct their performance under prompting were considered to be at a more advanced stage of development than students who could not correct themselves. Thus, instead of common advanced grammar course, students were placed in courses that were more suitable to their need (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009).

2.4.3 The Psychometric-based Criticism of DA

Non-dynamic assessment's proponents have often criticized dynamic assessment's researchers because of reliability, generalizability and validity of their procedures. Interventionist DA researchers also have prepared psychometric properties of their procedures more seriously than before. Then they started to demonstrate traditional testing constructs into their work. Poehner (2007) claimed that DA's incompatibility does not invalidate it as an approach to assessment. It argues the need for DA researchers to outline their own procedures. The role of dynamic assessment is to minimize non-dynamic assessment because traditional vocabulary cannot convey it adequately. For instance, criterion-referenced assessment explains the success or failure of students to face with some predetermined degree of knowledge or ability but norm-referenced assessment explains an individual's performance in relation to other students. Actually in both cases, we might face standardization and lack of interaction. Dynamic assessment can be thought of as development-referenced more suitably because its effectiveness depends on the impact that it has on learner's development. Poehner (2007) claimed that changing our perception of assessment from a criterion-referenced or norm-referenced viewpoint to a development-referenced viewpoint prioritize development over psychometric concerns. This is true in interactionist DA, in case that the central concern is how mediation can best be used to help learners at any given moment (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009).

Experts consider DA methodologies as the great hurdle of success of dynamic assessment as an overcoming paradigm within mainstream research. Dynamic assessment researchers have not made systematic efforts to psychometrically establish the validity and reliability of their methods. For interactionist DA researchers, psychometric concerns are not noticed since they prevent from standardization in favor of understanding and raising development of the individual. Although a recurring problem is statistical models, it should be developed for the evaluation of fixed properties. Then, it is less proportionate for depicting the kinds of dynamic. Interventionist researchers continue to validate their traditional methods. Researchers of interactionist dynamic assessment pursue a case study approach to research and validate their work on the basis of an accumulation of deep studies of individuals or groups of individuals. Those who are working in interventionist dynamic assessment, pursue standardized administration methods (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009).

2.4.4 Generalizability

Generalizability relates to the degree that a person can make statements about individuals' performance in non-assessment contexts on the basis of their performance during assessment. Van Lier (2004) claimed that treating context as a set of variables can be added to the object of study raises serious questions about that what kinds of information count as context, how much it counts, and in what ways. Dynamic assessment persuades us to think again about relationship between individuals and their environment. In dynamic assessment, individuals' interactions with others and with cultural art workings in their environment are understood as the source of development. Poehner (2007) found that Feuerstein's model of advantage is so salient in understanding how dynamic assessment forms a concept of the relationship between performance and context. All parts of dynamic assessment is coherent and systematic because they involve mediating learners' development in the ZPD and engaging learners in the ZPD, otherwise learners should find a point that they could complete tasks independently. Gipps (1994) found that generalizability is less of a concern in the classroom environment because assessment is not limited to single incidences but it can involve an accumulation of observations (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009).

2.4.5 Reliability

Another criticism of dynamic assessment is related to test reliability and standardization. If standardization would not be applied, the test would not be reliable. Test reliability originates from consistency and accuracy of the test. Within dynamic assessment, interventionist researchers do not attempt to reduce measurement error but interactionist approaches are more problematic than interventionist researchers. With regard to unpredictable and urgent nature of development, if the procedure has more reliability, its effect on promoting individual development is more (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009).

2.4.6 Validity

Differing in fundamental ways of traditional testing and classroom assessment has originated from applying valid standardized tests to classroom environment without any problem. The first one can be identified as isolated abilities because it is related to stable and separate traits that can be evaluated, but the second one is concerned with understanding the processes of development. On the other hand, classroom assessment is less interested in observed consistencies in performance than in helping individuals improve their functioning. By regard to their purpose, all assessment must have validity. Bachman (2000) has identified validity as a process of deciding about what a test evaluates is really worth counting. Lantolf and Poehner (2004) claimed that validating the activity of a teachers' assessment need to explanation of its effect on student development. Validity cannot be related to exclusive to testing specialists however is fundamental to all classroom practitioners. In dynamic assessment field, its practitioners must address another construct, namely, development. In dynamic assessment, all features can be in understood in context of interaction between mediators and students. Dynamic assessment also represents that student development becomes the immediate consequence and actually is a primary goal of the procedure (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2009).

3. Conclusion and Implications

Dynamic assessment is a sort of challenge for common views about assessment. It gradually evaluates everything about a field. In dynamic assessment field, we are faced with zone of proximal development which is related to a person's developmental potential that is acquired through an adult guidance or collaborating with an experienced peer. Through ZPD, the assessor finds what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help.

Many experts agree on using dynamic assessment instead of non-dynamic assessment because it lets students participate in the process of what they are doing and it gives them a role. Actually this method involved students in the environment totally. Students and their teacher have a good relationship with each other, and the aim is to help students to increase their level of learning and make them more knowledgeable.

Dynamic assessment has helped education through gathering data about students' potential, and also it is able to adapt and accommodate students to the environment. As it mentioned above, most experts agreed about this kind of assessment because it pays attention to students' ability through ZPD and decide or assess on the basis of it. As an offer, it is good to consider dynamic assessment in speaking field because students are more concerned with it. Moreover, some experts thought that dynamic assessment should be predesigned by demonstrating some psychometric constructs into their framework which considers reliability, generalizability and validity. Dynamic assessment can help students to increase their capabilities and develop it.

Dynamic assessment in fact has profound implications not only for formal testing but for educational practice more generally, and for language education in particular, given that it posits a dialectical relation between instruction and

assessment. Specifically, joint activity intended to reveal a learner's ZPD and the provision of mediation to support continued development are fully integrated in DA. Dynamic assessment can help teachers to use interactive activities which lead to better understanding of L2 pragmatics for EFL students. Thus, incorporating more ZPD-oriented activities into the EFL lessons may increase their own particular chance of meaningful interaction.

DA principles provide a framework for organizing interactions with L2 learners that not only permits greater insights into their abilities in the language but also supports their continued development. DA has been the topic of many projects regarding its effects on reading, speech acts and writing. Regarding speech acts, Tajeddin and Tayebipour (2012) suggested that speech acts should be included within the materials which EFL learners are exposed to from the very low levels to higher levels of proficiency. Hence, it is recommended that textbook writers as well as instructors pay to the speech acts attention they really deserve.

Regarding reading comprehension sub skills, Naeini and Duvall (2012) came to the conclusion that using DA helps teachers to have more chance to assist the students in focusing in certain issues in each meditation session. And finally, concerning the writing skill, Isavi (2012) found that DA, which has been embraced by psychological researchers, has important implications for teachers concerning what they can do to aid learners in their learning by setting tasks which are at a level just beyond that of learners' current level of functioning and teaching them how to take further steps up to the coming unassisted levels.

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