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The Impact of Interactionist Mediation Phase of Dynamic Assessment as a Testing Tool to Deviate Anxious Learners towards Facilitative Anxiety

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Abstract

Although the interactionist mediation model of dynamic assessment contrary to the static assessment is well supported way of assessment in English language environment, everyday new related language issues come to its domain to make it more powerful than it is. The dynamic assessment along with its three phases: pretest, mediation, and posttest, has been premised on the Zone of Proximal Development stated by Vygotsky. This study aims at demonstrating the effect of interactive mediation phase of dynamic assessment as a useful instrument, helping anxious learners to overcome the debilitating (dysphoric) anxiety they bring with themselves to the classroom, and with the help of interactive mediation, to move to one step further to a perfect facilitative (euphoric) anxiety. To do so, 100 participants of pre-intermediate level of proficiency, all in the same age, half males and half females were selected by a convenient sampling procedure in one of the institutes in Tehran, Daneshmand. Then the participants were given a standard anxiety test in order that the researcher could separate high anxious learners from the mid and low ones. After that, with the help of the results, 30 high-anxious learners were assigned equally to the control group and the experimental group. The control group was assessed by a static assessment while the experimental group was evaluated through an interactive mediation phase of dynamic assessment. The same standardized anxiety pretest was given to the participants at the end of course as the post-test. Finally, it was found that the interactionist mediation phase of the dynamic assessment can provide a facilitative anxiety that is required for the classroom environment.

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1. Introduction

Testing is the best known method of measuring students' constructs by which teachers can gain an understanding of their students' achievement. There are many ways of testing that according to the context of study can be carried on. The usual imagination that we have about the test and testing is the achievement tests, held at the middle or at the end of a course, but this is just one form of measuring students' behaviors.

(Brown, 2007) stated one who wants to measure students' performance in the classroom, he/she must know that testing and assessment are to some extent two different terms: The testing is well-prepared administrative procedures. It is highly standardized, high-stake, and reliable so that it can be administered to test a specific characteristic of a large number of population. Its statistically determined findings can be easily replicable to a large population. They occur at pre-determinately interval times. They are administrated, because the needs a school or country has. The assessment, on the other hand, is a continuous process. It happens during the course of study in a way that a teacher gives comments, feedback and etc. to his students to make them aware of their mistakes and to some extent help students correct their mistakes in a meaningful interaction. The focus of the present study is on the latter one. With this view on assessment, the study is to clarify the utility of the assessment in the classroom.

Distinguishing between test and assessment, the proponents of assessment have tried to create some techniques regarding assessment to make it more powerful. One of the assessment techniques is related to the Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky sees ZPD as a concept that exists in each learner. It is the distance between learners' present states of development and their potential development. The dynamic assessment is premised on the ZPD. The idea in Vygotsky's writing is that the ZPD entails a dual evaluation of a learner's ability so that one can find out what a learner cannot do by herself/himself, and can do with and without a bit of assistance. The DA procedure includes pretest, mediation or support, and finally a posttest. Using the DA, teachers can provide support to see how far learners can go when a teacher gives them a bit of assistance. The DA tells teachers what is currently in the process of developing. This assistant is not just a feedback or explicit correction, but these features can be parts of it. The teacher should be sensitive what the learner needs at a specific point of time. The teacher should make it relevant to the learners' needs.

The current study intends to investigate the positive role of mediation phase of dynamic assessment to reduce students' stress to a facilitative anxiety that some believe it is needed for the students to have this kind of anxiety in the classroom.

2. Review of the Literature

The dynamic assessment is a method of assessing students' performance while one is teaching them. This shows the amalgamation of instruction and assessment simultaneously. The DA has originally been premised on the idea of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, the tasks a child has not acquired, but he/she has the capacity of learning it with an enough portion of assistance an adult provides for her/him.

The ideas on the zone of development were later made in a number of psychological and educational theories and approaches. Most notably, they were developed under the work of dynamic assessment that focuses on the testing of learning and developmental potential (Stenberg & Grikorenko 2001; 2002; Haywood & Lidz 2007). (Reuven Feuerstein, 1979; 2002 as cited in Poehner in 2004) stated that there are two kinds of DA, interventionist and interactionist. There is a standardized and chronological way of mediation in the former, but the latter was introduced by Feuerstein is called Mediated Learning Experiences in which instruction and assessment happen simultaneously, and the teacher is responsible for choosing what kind of mediation is required at a specific time.

According to the developmental theories of Vygotsky and Feuerstein, who have claimed human beings are not static, but are always in states of transition and transactional relationships with the outer world, the dynamic assessment (2006) received also significant attention in the recent revisions of cognitive developmental theory by Joseph Campione, Ann Brown, and John D. Bransford and in theories of multiple intelligences by Howard Gardner and Robert Sternberg.

One of the most dangerous affective factors which can impede learning is the anxiety. It can really prevent students from learning. There are many studies that have shown the anxiety is a major affective factor. Albert & Harber (1960 as cited in Brown 2004) differentiated between the debilitative and facilitative anxiety also called

harmful and helpful anxiety respectively. The debilitating anxiety is completely detrimental and the teacher should diagnose the damaging role of this deliberative anxiety to apply some strategies and techniques to overcome it.

On other hand, facilitative anxiety is the enough amount of tension and stress one has for fulfilling a task. It is proven that this kind of anxiety is required in the educational settings, particularly in SLA contexts. For example (Baily, 1983) has shown that the facilitative anxiety is one of the most required and significant parts of classroom setting. It should be mentioned a little anxiety is useful for every student to complete a task.

(Malley, 1985) in his learning strategies has pointed to Socioaffective Strategies. He believes that cooperation and interaction are effective concepts in the SLA. In this case, Vygotsky and O'Malley have the same view.

Feuerstein (1979; 2002 as cited in poehner 2004) has stated the concept of MLE (Mediated Learning Experiences) that is defined as following: it refers to the way an adult as a mediating individual, selects environmental stimuli regarding learner's need and promote those stimuli in the learners with the appropriate amount of interaction and negotiation.

There are many studies regarding the Dynamic Assessment in which different areas of SLA problems have been clarified, but there are a few on the part of students' overcoming affective factors. For example Zoghi and Malmeeer (2013) have shown the effectiveness of DA on learners' intrinsic motivation. They said DA can provide intrinsic motivation that is the most significant types of motivation a learner needs to have a good performance in the classroom. Therefore, the SLA teachers should be aware of affective factors the learners have. The classroom contexts can be different because of the students' different views toward it.

Regarding the aforesaid studies, the present article is going to demonstrate the amount of detrimental anxiety EFL learners bring with themselves to the classroom setting. Therefore, with the help of the mediation phase of DA techniques, their anxiety can be facilitative and beneficial that some believe it is required in different situations, particularly in SLA. As the effectiveness of the facilitative anxiety has been proven, EFL teachers can use the DA strategies and techniques to take learners to this point of the required anxiety.

Although there are many studies regarding the theory behind the DA, ZPD, there are a few studies due to affective factors. As far as affective factors are very crucial to SLA setting, the interactionist mediation of the dynamic assessment can to some extent help learners overcome their anxiety; therefore, this study is going to demonstrate the learner development of facilitative anxiety through its mediation phase.

2.1. Statement of the problem

As far as the Iranian language schools do not pay attention to the students' development during the course, and because they use a psychometric and traditional way of testing, and since the affective factor is a big issue in area of EFL context, and because there is no much attention to this case in Iranian setting, the current study aims to use the interactionist mediation of DA as a testing tool, in which the instruction and assessment are integrated, to provide an interactive situation in which learners can to some extent feel relaxed and experience a better learning situation.

2.2. Research questions

1. Does mediation phase of dynamic assessment effect Iranian EFL learners of English facilitative anxiety?
2. Will experimental group develop toward a facilitative anxiety from Pre-test to post-test?
3. Will control group develop toward a facilitative anxiety from pre-test to post-test?

2.3. Research hypothesis

1. There is no relationship between mediation phase of the dynamic assessment and development of facilitative anxiety.
2. The Experimental group will not show any development from pre-test to the post-test.
3. The control group will not show any development from pre-test to the post-test.

2.4. *Goal of the study and research questions*

This study aims at demonstrating the anxiety the Iranian EFL learners bring with themselves to the classroom, and using the DA techniques to decrease their debilitating anxiety to a facilitative one.

To do so, a mixed method was carried on to investigate the way learners, with the help of DA techniques, overcome the deliberative anxiety and go through the stages of development to a facilitative anxiety. With the help of DA techniques, it will be understood that the facilitative anxiety can be provided by eliminating the detrimental anxiety factors through a sensitively supportive mediation. It should be mentioned that teachers are responsible for creating such an anxiety. The study also shows what techniques the teacher uses in order to help students overcome their harmful anxiety.

2.5. *Significance of the study*

The interactionist mediation which takes place in classroom setting provides a parent-child relationship that can help both teacher and students improve their interaction. By doing so, teacher can support students whenever it is needed at a specific point of time. With the help of findings from this research, teachers can understand the traditional and standardized assessment is not the only way of assessing students. Teachers can understand the usefulness of the dynamic assessment in the classroom, and they can also understand how to use its techniques to have a good assessment of students while they are teaching.

3. **Methodology**

3.1. *Design*

A quantitative method of data collection was designed to see the effect of the dynamic assessment on the development of facilitative anxiety. Students were divided in two groups, 15 students were assigned to the experimental group and the other 15 students to the control group. This study has used a pre-test, mediation and post-test procedure to see the effect of the mediation phase of DA on the learners' development of facilitative anxiety. There were some procedures for conducting this research including a test of TOEFL proficiency in speaking, a standardized anxiety test called FLCAS. Then there was the interactionist mediation of DA in the experimental group in which there was a video prompt in each session. The learners first watched a movie and were then asked to play the roles of the native speakers. Whenever there was something wrong with the students' production, the teacher intervened in their speech. There was a form of static assessment in the control group in which the teacher explicitly corrected the learners when they committed errors. Finally, the same speaking proficiency pre-test and the same FLCAS were designed as the post-test.

3.2. *Participant*

The participants of the present study who were studying in Daneshmand Institute, located in Tehran, were selected in the following process. First 100 pre-intermediate participants of the study were chosen for the study regarding a speaking proficiency test. Then, with a standardized anxiety test of FLCAS, 30 high-anxious students were extracted from these 100 participants, equally assigned to the experimental group and the control group. Dynamic assessment interactionist mediation was applied in the experimental group, and static assessment was applied to the control group.

3.3. *Method of data collection*

To collect quantitative data, some instruments were used: there was a test of speaking proficiency that the researcher had conducted to determine the level of students' proficiency. Then there was also a FLCAS to separate high anxious learners from other participants. Then the interactionist mediation of dynamic assessment was performed to push the high anxious learners to a level of proficiency by which they could act without any assistance

and at the same time deviate them to a facilitative anxiety. A video prompt was watched in each session. The learners first watched a movie, and were then asked to play the roles of the native speakers. Whenever there was something wrong with the students' production, the teacher intervened in their speech. The learners also participated in a speaking proficiency post-test, and after that in the same FLCAS. Although the dynamic assessment of speaking proficiency has been worked a lot, the present study uses it as an instrument rather than an independent variable.

3.4. Method of data analysis

There was a paired-sample t-test to demonstrate the result provided by the experimental group on the pre-test and post-test and the result provided by the control group on the pre-test and post-test. Then the results in two groups were compared to see the effectiveness of treatment.

3.5. Procedure

There was a test of speaking proficiency to see the students' actual level of Zone of Proximal Development. 100 pre-intermediate students who the researcher had thought were at this level of speaking were participated in this test. They were learning English at Daneshmand English Institute in Tehran. Separating high-anxious students from those with low anxiety, an anxiety test called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was conducted. Therefore, thirty students were named high-anxious ones with the help of the result found in FLCAS. 15 students were assigned to the experimental group, and 15 ones to the control group. Both groups participated in 10 sessions on speaking proficiency. A video prompt was watched in each session. The learners in both groups first watched a movie, and were then asked to play the roles of the native speakers. Whenever there was something wrong with the students' production in the EG, the teacher mediated in their speech, but there was no teacher's mediation in the CG. Finally, there was another test of speaking proficiency and FLCAS as a post-test. In mediation phase, it was the teacher provided the students with suitable mediation. The students who made more mistakes, undoubtedly needed much more mediation. The focus of the session was on the English routines. First, the teacher played a video prompt in which two friends were talking about one of their friends' daily activities. Students were then asked to explain individually what activities he used to do. Whenever the learners made errors, the teacher mediated in their speech to help them be aware of the errors they had committed. When the learners could correct themselves with the mediation of the teacher, the teacher switched to the other students. The time of interactive mediation for each student was dependent on the student's correct response to the teacher's mediation. The focus is on the ill-formed use of "makes", "has" instead of well-formed use of "does". There is an example of teacher's mediation that demonstrates the quality of interactive mediation of the teacher (T) with a learner (L):

T: What activities does Joe do after 12 o'clock?

L: He eats his lunch at his work. He makes his shopping in the mall.

T: (question-look)

L: (laugh) I mean hm...hm

T: What did you say?

L: I said" he makes his shopping in the mall.

T: Yes, you said....but you don't think there is something wrong with the sentence.

L: Wrong.....hmm..... in the store.

T: No, mall is right. He *makes* his shopping.....

L: Aha.... He made his shopping

T: No, the tense is right because.....there is something wrong with the verb you have just used.

L: It is present time. He has his shopping in the mall.

T: Not has.....it is a verb you use before "homework, laundry, exercise".

L: Do, Do, Do

T: Yes, It's right. But it is just one person.

L: Does. He does his shopping in the mall.

T: Great. It is completely right.

Both the teacher and learner laugh.

As you can see the interactive mediation of the teacher in the students’ performance of the task makes the learning meaningful for both the teacher and the learner. Using this kind of assessment, the teacher could provide a situation in which the learner was able to perform the task better. With the help of interactive mediation, it was observed that the learner’s stress and anxiety were decreasing to a facilitative one.

4. Results and Discussion

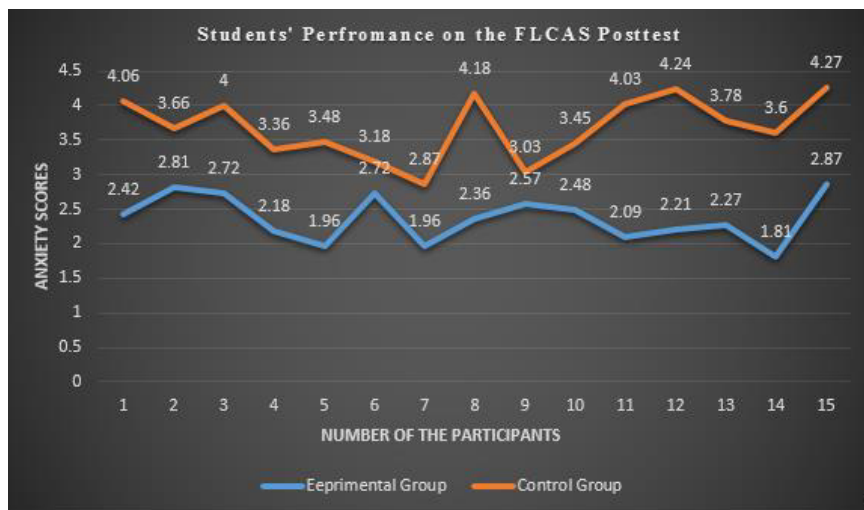
To provide quantitative data there was a scale utilized in this study. The descriptive scale that was used in this article was Paired Sample T-test. The FLCAS scores range from 33 to 165. The higher scores the students received the more anxious they were. In order to use the SPSS program, the scores were recalculated. Therefore, they ranged from 1 to 5 (1 for low anxious learners and 5 for high anxious learner). The result obtained from this measurement scale is as following:

Table 1 Paired T-Test

Groups	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard error
Experimental Group	15	2.36	0.33	0.08
Control Group	15	3.67	0.44	0.11

It is easily understandable that with the help of the interactionist mediation phase of dynamic assessment, the anxious learners have developed to a facilitative anxiety that is needed for classroom. With the use of scores from the FLCAS, a statistical software passage was used to present the data statistically. This Paired Sample t-test can obviously show the significant effect of the DA in such a class.

There is also a demographic chart in order to show the effect of the treatment on the experimental group. It verifies the difference that exists between the two groups (experimental and control) base on the posttest of the FLCAS. As it is clear, the students of the experimental group (group 1) perfectly had better performances on the test. It shows that the anxiety of the experimental group decreased at the end of the course that caused them to have a better performance in the acquisition of English routines than the control group that its participants had the amount of stress they had had before the treatment.



Graph 1. Demographic representation of students’ performance on FLCAS

With the help of results provided by the scale, the null hypotheses 1 and 2 have been rejected, but hypothesis number 3 was supported. With the results provided, we can clearly understand that the debilitating anxiety of the students can be decreased to a facilitative anxiety that some believe it is a required part of the classroom

environment. Although the anxiety is not a fixed factor, and it is subject to change, this specific mediation can decrease it to some extent to a facilitative one. This is really the main important job of teachers to choose which kind of mediation is needed for a specific point at time.

4. Conclusion

The study intended to investigate whether dynamic assessment could impact on the high-anxious students' development toward facilitative anxiety. The results revealed that the dynamic assessment could help the learners to overcome the harmful anxiety they had at the beginning of the course.

Doing so, the anxious students were assigned to the EG and CG. The EG received treatment, but the CG was taught by a traditional method. Finally, with the help of statistical result, the researcher came to this conclusion that the treatment was an effective process.

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