

The Effect of Static and Dynamic Assessment on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Autonomy

¹ Seyyed Hossein Sanaeifar, ² Lida Farsi

¹ English Language Department, Qaemshahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qaemshahr, Iran

² Department of English Language and Literature, Islamic Azad University, Ayatollah Amoli Branch, Mazandaran, Iran

*Corresponding: s.h.sanaeifar@qaemiau.ac.ir

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of static and dynamic assessment on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy. In this study, 50 male (N=19) and female (N=31) students were chosen from private institutes in Sari. They were randomly divided into static (N=25) and dynamic assessment (N=25) groups based on their performance on the Oxford Placement Test. For the static group the researcher administered a test after teaching each unit (formative assessment) and a test which included all the units at the end of instructional period (summative assessment). For the dynamic group the researcher used sandwich model of dynamic assessment. The instructional phase lasted 11 sessions. The data were collected through the pre- and the post-tests. The learners' autonomy questionnaire (Zhang & Li, 2004) was used. The SPSS software was used for the data analysis. Findings of this study revealed that static assessment did not have statistically significant effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy, but dynamic assessment had a statistically significant effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy.

Key words: static assessment, summative assessment, formative assessment, dynamic assessment, learners' autonomy

1. Introduction

Testing in language is an undividable section of programs in education and plays a substantial role in the process of language teaching and learning. There are two major kinds of language assessment, namely static (summative and formative) and dynamic. Static assessment (SA) are widely used in Iranian EFL contexts whether in schools or institutes. However, this context does not pay much attention to dynamic assessment (DA). In other words, in Iranian EFL contexts, assessing learners' current level of language knowledge is concerned rather than learners' potential level of language knowledge in future. Promoting learners' autonomy is an important factor for making ideal teaching and learning situation in the classroom. Autonomous learners can involve in decision making processes regarding their own language competence. Regarding autonomous learning, learners have the power and right to learn for themselves and become responsible for their own learning.

Autonomy in education means involving students' capacity to use their learning independently of teachers. Thus, the concept of autonomy could be an incontrovertible goal for any educational purposes (Littlewood, 1997). According to Littlewood (1996), an autonomous person is an individual who has an independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her actions. Learners who are able to self-regulate the locus of control throughout the learning experience are strategic learners (Zimmerman, 1998). In second language education, learner autonomy involves second language learners gaining awareness of their own ways of learning such as learning styles and learning strategies, so that they can utilize their strengths and work on their weaknesses (Benson, 2008).

In SA, the evaluator administers an assessment and the individual's performance on that assessment is determined by comparison to norms or set criteria. A static assessment assesses the skills and knowledge the individual has gained from his or her prior experiences (Dollaghan & Campbell, 1998). On the other side of the spectrum, DA is an approach to understanding individual differences and their implications for instruction that embeds intervention within the assessment procedure. In DA the mediator seeks to improve learner performance through modification of student activity (Haywood & Lidz,

2007). Considering the importance of assessment and autonomous learning in language teaching and learning, the researchers want to investigate the effect of static and dynamic assessment on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Does static assessment have any statistically significant effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy?

RQ2. Does dynamic assessment have any statistically significant effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy?

RQ3. What type of assessment has more effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy?

2. Review of the Related Literature

There is a difference between DA and SA. Static assessment refers to an assessment in which test takers are required to answer the items without any feedback or intervention from a more knowledgeable person i.e. their teacher or instructor (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). They stated that the score of the students is the only type of the feedback for the learners. According to Bachman (2002), if the assessment of abilities and aptitudes was considered at the end of specific instructional course, the examination would be known as the summative assessment. She also defined formative assessment (FA) as the assessment when the abilities of the learner are assessed frequently during the semester. Regarding the issue of validity, FA potentially can reinforce classroom instruction effectiveness, meaning that FA shows high degree of consequential validity (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

Lantolf and Poehner (2004) argued that DA mixes teaching and assessment into an integrated activity which promotes the enhancement of the learner via appropriate formats of mediation sensitive to current abilities of the individual (or the group). Basically, DA is a method for concurrently promoting and evaluating enhancement that takes into account individual zone of proximal development (ZPD). Lantolf and Poehner (2004) defined DA as a unified activity and task integrating instruction and assessment to promote learner development through mediation that can be used by an individual or a group. In DA, assessment and instructions are a solo task that tries to concurrently diagnose and elevate learner improvement by offering learners mediation, a qualitatively distinctive manifestation of reinforcement through feedback (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008). Mediation is given amid the evaluation process and is proposed to convey to shed light on implicit issues and help learners overcome them. Lidz (1991) clarifies that DA concentrates not on what people can perform all alone but on their performance when they receive interventions from their teacher during the process of assessment which seems has a facilitating role in students' development. Undoubtedly, a focal tenet in DA is that the diagnosis of learners' capacities obliges making note of their responsiveness when reinforcement is offered to help them address challenges, and moreover, it is exactly such collaboration that permits direction to elevate learner improvement. As such, teaching and assessment together form a bound, improving situated movement (Poehner, 2008).

According to Poehner and Lantolf (2005), DA is associated with the theory of Vygotsky's social constructivism which is named sociocultural perspective. Based on this theory, they stated that the acquisition of child occurs through taking part in or presenting in socially or culturally experiences with a more experienced adult. Vygotsky (1986) believes learning takes place within zone of proximal development (ZPD). In the development of this theory, learning and instructing, this concept plays a prominent role. Kozulin and Garb (2002) mentioned that ZPD is related to the learning range that learners can achieve when they are involving in meaningful tasks and activities with a more experienced adult. Lantolf and Poehner (2004) defined two types of mediation in DA named as: interventionist and interactionist DA. Interactionist DA stand on Vygotsky point of view (ZPD). In interactionist DA, meditation and modification of students' performance rises from the process of interaction between the mediator and the student. On the other hand, interventionist DA uses standard procedure for meditation process so in order to produce quantifiable results for making predictions about students' performance.

Based on Sternberg and Grigorenko (2002), DA procedure has two formats named as sandwich and cake. In the sandwich format, intervention is placed between administrations of pre and post-tests. It seems that, mediation phase is sandwiched between these two tests. For evaluating the fluctuation of students' performance and to determine the effectiveness of treatment, the results of pre and post-tests compared with each other. On the other hand, in the cake format mediation happened during the process of the assessment. In this format, there are sequences of interventions and tests depend on problems arise from assessment process. These layouts of interventions and tests make this procedure similar to cake with several layouts. The cake format is more effective approach for individualizing meditation which is helps students to overcome their difficulties and problems in their assessment activities (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002).

Autonomy is enhanced when students are involved in the DA process which is provide opportunities for students to evaluate their own progress pattern, create their own learning preference, self-monitor and self-assess their learning tasks. Through dynamic instruction and intervention, students are provided with opportunity to engage in self-monitoring process and ability to use this process to promote their language skills and proficiency (Dörnyei, 2009). Autonomous learning centered on the students' awareness about their learning process and different stages of language achievement (Little, 1994). In addition, autonomous learning helps students to improve their academic performance and make a ground for their devel-

opment (McCroskey, 1992). Paiva (2011) argue that autonomy has a socio-cognitive dimension. It involves students' mental capacity in political, social, and economic senses. Autonomy is a non-linear process, which has a dynamic nature, including instability, variability and adaptability. Autonomy has an important role in the SLA because it can facilitate the learning process and help the learning system to act beyond the classroom towards students' learning life.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

In this study 50 out of 73 Iranian EFL learners at the intermediate level, both males (N=19) and females (N=31) with the age range of 16 to 20 were selected from private institutes in Sari, Iran. They were randomly divided into static and dynamic assessment groups based on their performance (simple random sampling). The learners' experience in language learning was at least 2 years. It is worth mentioning that the convenience sampling procedure was used for the selection of the participants.

3.2 Instruments

There were two instruments in this study. The first one was the Oxford Placement Test. This test was applied to homogenize language learners in the present study based on their language proficiency. It comprised 60 items in three parts. These parts were designed for vocabulary and grammar (40 items) and reading comprehension (20 items). The second instrument was learners' autonomy questionnaire developed by Zhang and Li (2004). The questionnaire consisted of 32 items in a Likert scale format. The researcher piloted this questionnaire and calculated its reliability using Cronbach alpha formula through which the index was found to be 0.80.

3.3 Procedure

The data of this study was collected through the following procedure: at first an OPT test was administered to 73 available participants; out of this number, 50 were found to be at the intermediate level based on the criteria of the OPT. They were randomly classified into static and dynamic assessment groups, 25 learners in each group. Next for the purpose of measuring their autonomy level before the instructional phase, the learners' autonomy questionnaire was distributed among the participants as a pre-test. They were assured for confidentiality and ethical issues for the answer they provided. At the instructional phase, all the participants were exposed to the same teaching materials (five units of Top Notch 2) and taught by the same teacher. For the static group, the researcher administered a test after teaching each unit (formative assessment) and a test which included all the units at the end of the instructional period (summative assessment). For the dynamic group, the researcher used the sandwich model of dynamic assessment i.e. after each unit, the researcher administered a test as a pre-test then, after collecting pre-test information, the researcher provided mediation and necessary information for answering the test questions to students. Note that the researcher did not provide any feedback to them. Finally, after the mediation phase, the researcher re-administered the test for the students as a post-test. This process was repeated for each unit. The instructional phase lasted 11 sessions, each session for one and half hours, two days a week. For the purpose of evaluating their autonomy level, after the instructional phase, the learners' autonomy questionnaire was distributed to the participants as a post-test. They were assured for confidentiality and ethical issues for the answers they provided. After collecting the data, they were analyzed using the SPSS software version 22.

4. Results

4.1 Answering the First Research Question

The descriptive statistics of the static assessment pre- and post-tests scores is showed in table below. Table 4.1 shows that the mean of the static assessment pre-test is more than the mean score of the post-test. It means that the level of learners' autonomy decreased from 78.16 to 75.88.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics of the Static Assessment Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SA pre-test	25	39	133	78.16	25.522
SA post-test	25	40	121	75.88	23.440
Valid N (listwise)	25				

Before testing this research question, it was necessary to find whether there was normality of the data distribution for the pre- and post-test scores. To do this, the researcher conducted a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Table 4.2
One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality

		SA pre-test	SA post-test
N		25	25
Normal Parameters	Mean	78.16	75.88
	Std. Deviation	25.522	23.440
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.081	.087
	Positive	.081	.082
	Negative	-.064	-.087
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.407	.433
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.996	.992

As indicated in Table 4.2, the obtained Sigs were 0.996 and 0.992 respectively ($p > 0.05$), so the normality of data distribution were confirmed. Therefore, a parametric test was used for the mean comparison. To compare the pre- and post-test means, the paired samples T-test was used. Inferential statistics for the static assessment is shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3
Paired Samples T-Test for the Static Assessment Group

	Paired Differences		Sig. (2-tailed)		
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	
	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 SA pre-test - SA post-test	-5.725	10.285	.588	24	.562

According to Table 4.3, the results of the paired samples T-test showed that the static assessment did not have statistically significant effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy, $t(24) = .588$, $p > .05$.

4.2 Answering the Second Research Question

The descriptive statistics of the dynamic assessment for the pre- and post-tests scores is showed in the table below. Table 4.4 shows that the mean of the dynamic assessment for the pre-test is less than the mean score of the post-test. It means that the level of learners' autonomy increased from 91.88 to 96.36.

Table 4.4
Descriptive Statistics of Dynamic Assessment Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
DA pre-test	25	55	151	91.88	19.361
DA post-test	25	63	150	96.36	19.098
Valid N (listwise)	25				

Before running the inferential statistics, it was necessary to find whether there was normality of the data distribution of the pre- and post-test scores. To do this, the researcher conducted a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Table 4.5
One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality

		DA pre-test	DA post-test
N		25	25
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	91.88	96.36
	Std. Deviation	19.361	19.098
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.101	.144
	Positive	.101	.144
	Negative	-.093	-.082
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.503	.722
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.962	.674

As indicated in Table 4.5, the obtained Sigs were 0.962 and 0.674 respectively ($p > .05$), so the normality of data distribution was confirmed. Therefore, a parametric test was used for mean comparison. To compare the pre- and post-test means, the paired samples t-test was used. Inferential statistics of the dynamic assessment for the pre- and post-test scores is shown in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6

Paired samples T-test for the Dynamic Assessment Group

	Paired Differences			Sig. (2-tailed)	
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			t	df
	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 DA pre-test - DA post-test	-5.829	-3.131		-6.855	24 .000

According to Table 4.6, the paired samples t-test showed that dynamic assessment had a statistically significant effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy, $t(24) = 6.85$, $p < .05$.

4.3 Answering the Third Research Question

Summarizing the previous results obtained from the analysis of the first and second research questions, it can be drawn that learners' autonomy was not significantly improved after receiving the static assessment, but learners' autonomy significantly increased after receiving the dynamic assessment. Hence, it can be concluded that the dynamic assessment group performed better than the static assessment group in promoting learners' autonomy.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As already mentioned, the current research tried to find the effect of static and dynamic assessment on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy. After analyzing the data, different findings have been reached. The first finding was that static assessment did not have statistically significant effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy. According to Sternberg and Grigorenko (2002), in SA whether summative or formative, test items are presented to examinees either one at a time or all at once, and each examinee is asked to respond to these items successively, without any intervention by their teacher. One possible reason for this finding is that teachers do not play an active role in static assessment. They just provide feedback after a test or an exam or a task to their students. So, their students highly remain dependent on teacher corrective feedback. Such a dependency on their teacher blocks students' creative ability and leads to reduction in their autonomy level respectively.

The second finding of this study was that dynamic assessment had a statistically significant effect on promoting Iranian intermediate EFL learners' autonomy. As Lantolf and Poehner (2008) asserted, in DA, assessment and instructions are a solo task that looks for concurrent diagnosis and learner improvement by offering learners mediation, a qualitatively distinctive manifestation of reinforcement through feedback and intervention. Such an active teachers' role in DA, promotes students' independence of their teachers. Also in DA, the nature of teacher and students' relationship can bring them opportunities to be more creative and allow the students to express their feelings and thoughts. Thus, by receiving teachers' mediation, students' autonomy level might improve.

The third finding of this study indicated that the dynamic assessment group performed better than the static assessment group in promoting learners' autonomy. According to Lidz (1991), DA concentrates not on what people can perform all alone but on their modifiability and on producing suggestions for interventions that appear successful in facilitating improved learner performance. On the other hand, in SA there is not such an intervention from teachers to students. As a result, DA can bring opportunities for students to keep on their learning track and be more autonomous than students which are receiving SA.

Regarding the results of this study, it can be concluded that contrary to the static assessment, the dynamic assessment was effective in promoting students' autonomy. Unfortunately, nowadays in Iranian EFL contexts, there is no sufficient emphasis on the dynamic assessment among language teachers. On the other hand, less autonomous students are the common concerns the teachers are dealing with in their teaching process. So, the researchers recommend English language teachers include DA in their teaching and learning practices. In addition, syllabus designers, curriculum developers and educational policy makers can use these findings to produce more effective syllabi and curriculum programs for English learners. Focusing on the positive role of DA in promoting students' autonomy can help teachers to enhance the learning journey for the students.

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Appendix

Learners' Autonomy Questionnaire

Adapted from Zhang and Li (2004)

Evaluation of English teacher's aims and requirements

Questions	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. I clearly understand the teacher's aims.	1	2	3	4	5
2. It is easy for me to make the teacher's goals into my own goals.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I clearly understand the importance of making the teacher's goals my own, as well as studying hard to achieve those goals.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I clearly understand the teacher's intention during in class learning activities.	1	2	3	4	5
5. In class, it is easy for me to keep up with the teacher's pace.	1	2	3	4	5

Evaluation of establishing studying goals and plans

Questions	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. Outside of assignments given by the teacher, I have a clear plan for studying on my own.	1	2	3	4	5
2. When studying English, I establish practical goals for myself based on my true English level.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am good at adjusting my studying plans based on my progress.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am good at creating a practical studying schedule for myself.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am good at establishing study goals based on the requirements outlined by the class.	1	2	3	4	5

Evaluation of the learning strategy's implementation

Questions	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. I have a complete understanding of the learning strategy.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can consciously employ effective strategies to improve my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can consciously employ effective strategies to improve my spoken English.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I can consciously employ effective strategies to improve my reading comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I can consciously employ effective strategies to improve my written English.	1	2	3	4	5

Evaluation of ability to monitor the usage of learning strategies

Questions	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. I can consciously monitor the usage of listening strategies during practice.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can consciously monitor the usage of speaking strategies during practice.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can consciously monitor the usage of reading strategies during practice.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I can consciously monitor the usage of writing strategies during practice.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am able to find and solve problems in my method of studying.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am conscious of whether or not my method of studying is practical.	1	2	3	4	5
7. If I realize that my method of study is impractical, I quickly find a more suitable one.	1	2	3	4	5

Evaluation of English learning process

Questions	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1. Outside of class, I take advantage of various opportunities to practice my English. (e.g. Using English to talk to classmates about daily life; participating in English speaking activities, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
2. I make an effort to overcome emotional issues that may hinder my English studies, such as shyness, anxiety, and inhibition.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I use available learning resources such as the library, internet, dictionaries, etc. to improve my English.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is easy for me to put newly learned English into practice.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I often study together with other people, such as practicing with a language partner, or practicing and reviewing materials with classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
6. While practicing English, I am able to realize my own mistakes and correct them.	1	2	3	4	5
7. When I discover my mistakes, I understand the underlying reason for making them (e.g. interference from my mother tongue, or a lack of familiarity with grammar rules, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
8. I select effective methods to become a better language student (such as speaking with successful English students about their experiences, taking a journal of my own pro-	1	2	3	4	5

gress, reading English newspapers, magazines, novels, etc.).					
9. During the process of completing a certain English learning task, I keep in line with my predetermined plan.	1	2	3	4	5
10. During the process of completing a certain English learning tasks, I often check and correct my comprehension of previously studied material.	1	2	3	4	5