



Promoting Learners' Willingness to Participate in Classroom Activities: Interventionist or Interactionist Dynamic Assessment?

¹Seyyed Hossein Sanaeifar, ²Seyyedeh Fatemeh Salimi Arshad

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

²Ministry of Education, Sowme'eh Sara, Guilan

s.h.sanaeifar@qaemiau.ac.ir

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Abstract: A lucrative classroom atmosphere develops by complete engagement between teachers, students, and learning tasks and activities. This study aims to investigate the effect of interventionist and interactionist dynamic assessment (DA) on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities (WTPCA). In this study, 28 intermediate Iranian EFL learners participated and were randomly classified into interventionist and interactionist groups - 14 learners in each group. For evaluating their willingness to participate in classroom activities level before the instructional phase, we distributed the WTPCA questionnaire among the participants as a pre-test. In the instructional phase, the interventionist group was exposed to the interventionist DA approach while in the interactionist DA group, the researchers used the interactionist DA approach. For evaluating their WTPCA level after the instructional phase, we distributed the WTPCA questionnaire among the participants as a post-test. This study revealed that interventionist DA did not have a significant effect on promoting learners' WTPCA, but the interactionist DA had a significant effect on promoting learners' WTPCA. The findings of the present study have some pedagogical implications that may help English language teachers, EFL learners, language curriculum program policymakers, and syllabus designers.

Keywords: Classroom Participation, Dynamic Assessment, Interactionist Dynamic Assessment, Interventionist Dynamic Assessment, Willingness to Participate in Classroom Activities.

1. Introduction

An effective learning process requires active participation and interaction by teachers and students in the learning tasks and activities. Despite the encouragement and use of various teaching methods by the teachers to stimulate active participation, unfortunately, most of the students are passive in the classroom practice and show a low level of participation in their learning process. For absorbing, seeking, and applying the necessary skills and knowledge in classroom practice, timely presence and active participation are expected from students in the learning process. A lucrative classroom atmosphere is generated by complete engagement between teachers, students, and learning tasks and activities. Classroom participation helps students to reach confidence about their learning effectiveness and makes them assured that learning occurs. Regarding academic consideration, class participation has some learning benefits, including developing critical thinking, increasing appreciation and tolerance of cultural differences, enhancing time management and interpersonal interactions, and improving four language skills.

For measuring students' actual cognitive ability not only the current level of performance is important but also the future level of performance is considered as an important element of a measurement procedure. Vygotsky (1978) believed that the independent performance of individuals should not be considered as the true indicator of their cognitive abilities. According to Vygotsky (1978), children-assisted potential performance with the presence of a more knowledgeable person (teacher, parent, adult, or peer) is considered as a true indicator of their mental development and ability rather than their current individual performance.

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) view of learning considered learners' actual developmental level as their potential future performance with the assistance of their instructors, not their current performance or product that is done alone. Dynamic assessment (DA) is grounded in such a perspective about learning i.e. Vygotsky's ZPD. According to

these approaches students can remove or solve their problems in the process of learning and assessment by receiving mediations or on-time hints provided by their teacher (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008).

The two major approaches in conducting a DA are the interventionist and the interactionist approaches. The interventionist approach applies a standardized procedure for providing pre-planned and pre-determined hints or guidance as mediation to students when they cannot answer the tests' questions correctly or complete the tasks or activities effectively. The interactionist approach is concerned with more situated and in-action mediation which is sensitive to each individual's ZPD. The interactionist DA is not a standardized procedure and is considered more effective than a pre-determined form of mediation (Poehner, 2008).

Active participation in learning activities can facilitate language learners learning performance and give them direction and awareness in the learning process. One of the prevalent problems that language teachers are dealing with nowadays is the learners' unwillingness to participate actively in learning activities in language classrooms. Also, engaging learners remains one of the biggest challenges facing Iranian teachers today. Unfortunately, in the Iranian EFL context especially in a school setting, learners are treated as passive recipients of the knowledge delivered by language teachers or as a bank for depositing contents, and their need for effective engagement in classroom practice is normally disregarded.

In addition, there is not any serious attempt to use language assessment as a tool for instruction in the Iranian EFL context. Dynamic assessment can trigger learners learning ability towards higher learning performances. Also, the emphasis is on the learners' learning product rather than their learning process in language assessment among Iranian language teachers. In other words, the assessors seek to assess the learners' current level of language performance not their potential level of language performance. So, regarding the problems mentioned above this study aims to investigate the effect of interventionist and interactionist dynamic assessment on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities. The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does interventionist dynamic assessment have any statistically significant effect on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities?

RQ2: Does interactionist dynamic assessment have any statistically significant effect on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities?

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Theoretical Background

Dynamic Assessment is a tool for instruction to promote learners' language performance and achievement using sensitive and formative mediation related to the learners' current language performance. Haywood and Lidz (2007) define DA as "an interactive approach to conducting assessments that focuses on the ability of the learner to respond to intervention" (p. 1). Williams and Burden (1997) also believed that DA is considered a procedure in which "assessment and learning are seen as inextricably linked and not separate" (p. 42). In order to produce effective change in the students' performance, the interaction in DA should be conscious, purposeful, and deliberate. In other words, consistent with a Vygotskian educational perspective, students' collaborative engagement in the learning process is considered as a socially meaningful cooperative activity that aims to develop students' achievements (Haywood & Lidz, 2007). DA enables the teachers to discover the learners' learning problems and difficulties precisely and help learners to overcome the difficulties. DA integrates both instruction and assessment processes and provides a suitable ground for teachers and learners to practice with the presence of both instruction and assessment sides (Lantolf & Throne, 2006).

To clear the DA concept, it is worth comparing DA with the static assessment (SA). In SA which is the conventional and common type of assessment, the final product of learning resulting from teaching practice is measured and emphasized. In SA there is not any mediation or help during the assessment by teachers and the assessment process measures only individual learner ability and performance. On the other hand, in DA the process of learning and students' potential performance with the help of their teacher mediation is concerned. According to Crick and Yu (2008), DA enhances learners' awareness based on their learning styles and characteristics and enables them to be autonomous in their learning process. Because of the dynamic nature of the classrooms, language learners understand and perceive the DA process much easier than the static assessment process.

Caffrey, Fuchs and Fuchs (2008) differentiate DA from non-dynamic assessment (NDA) regarding some features including relationships between tester and testee, provision of feedback, and nature of learning. Regarding the relationships between tester and testee, they believed that while in NDA there is a non-supportive and to some extent threatening atmosphere between an examiner and the examinee, in DA supportive and anxious-free atmosphere is provided as a result of the assessment process which produces a joint activity to enhance learners' language achievement. Considering the nature of provided feedback, whereas in NDA no or very little learner-friendly feedback may be provided, in DA feedback is fine-tuned to match learner-specific ZPD. With regards to the learning nature, NDA emphasizes and focuses on the learning final product, but DA focuses one step beyond the learning product i.e. the process of learning.

According to Lantolf and Poehner (2008), interventionist and interactionist are considered as two main approaches to DA. The interactionist approach applies an interactive and qualitative procedure for assessment, while the interventionist approach employs a standardized and quantitative procedure for assessment (Poehner, 2008). A pre-determined and standardized procedure for assessment and learning is not employed in the interactionist DA, but the development of an individual learner or even a group of learners is considered through the interactionist DA process (Poehner, 2008). Interventionist DA, on the other hand, applies standardized forms of mediation and intervention to achieve quantitative results by comparing students' performance before and after intervention and predicting their future performance. Scores are considered as an index of learning speed and the amount of help and mediation needed for a learner to effectively achieve the desired learning outcome (Poehner, 2008).

In Feuerstein's Interactionist Model, assessment and instruction are completely integrated in an interlinked way in which no one exists without the other one (Poehner, 2008). The main assumption here is that person's cognitive ability is not a static and fixed thing but mediation and interventions could customize or improve it. Feuerstein believed that learners should actively participate in the mediation process. The mediation process for the interactionist model in Feuerstein's view is not unidirectional from mediator to learners but this process is truly interactive in its nature. According to Poehner (2008), the interactionist model of DA helps language learners to learn how to acquire more information in their learning process. Also, this approach enhances learners' discovery ability to solve their learning problems and enables them to acquire important skills for successful learning.

Brown's Interventionist Model is grounded on the mutual interaction between teacher and students in the assessment process. In this approach, the teacher should provide some related prompts to obtain the desired answer for learning tasks and activities. The number of prompts required to achieve the objective and the right answer is considered as mediation in the interactionist approach to DA. According to Lantolf and Poehner (2004) in interventionist DA, the extent of assistance needed for mediating the learners to achieve intended and pre-designed learning objectives measures learning speed and development. In the interventionist approach to DA, the mediation is based on a standardized design provided during an assessment moving from pure implicit mediation at one continuum to pure explicit mediation at the other end.

Poehner (2008) differentiates between Brown's interventionist model and Feuerstein's interactionist model. In Brown's model of DA, mediation is ordered from implicit prompts to explicit prompts and at the endpoint, the accurate response is provided by the mediator and the tests are held in a pre-determined and standardized way. On the other hand, in Feuerstein's interactionist model the mediation is context-specified and based on what is happened in classroom interactions between mediator and students.

Two main formats of interventionist approach to DA are sandwich and cake formats. In sandwich format, the mediation is provided at the end of a test or series of activities and is the best choice to use in groups of learners. In the sandwich format, the mediation is provided between administering pre and post-tests. Pre-test sets as a starting measurement and a post-test administered to measure the efficiency of mediation i.e. the mediation *sandwiched* between pre-test and post-test. In cake format, the mediation takes place after each item of a test or task and is preferred to adjust individually (Fulcher, 2010). In the cake format, the mediator provides the mediation or intervention during the assessment process step by step whenever a problem arises or the learner fails to complete the task correctly.

Two main interventionist techniques based on Fulcher (2010) are graduated prompt and testing the limits. In the graduated prompt technique, the teacher asks learners some graded questions about the test task. In the opening stages, more implicit hints or questions are asked to help the learners to overcome a difficulty, if the learner fails to solve a problem or complete the task the more explicit hints or questions based on the nature of the problem are provided. In testing the limits technique, first, the mediator provides guided feedback to learners on their task completion or problem-solving performances. Then, the mediator encourages them to discuss their learning problems and how they manage themselves to overcome the problems.

According to Poehner (2008), in contrast to interventionist approaches to DA, the interactionist orientation is more consistent with Vygotsky's perspective on education which is believed that the best way to assess the psychological process of learning and cognitive development of learner is through qualitative, negotiated, and dynamic approach to assessment. Interactionist DA stands on Vygotsky's preference for interactional dialoging which is mediation (highly sensitive to the learner's ZPD) placed in the interaction between the mediator and the learner. During the process of the interactionist type of mediation, the mediator reacts to the learners' needs and continuously re-tuned and refined the structure of mediation to match better with the situation.

Regarding the challenge of DA, Haywood and Tzuriel (2002) believed that the DA process requires more skill, better training, more experience, and greater effort at the both teacher and students' sides than the SA process. The skill for operating DA effectively is not easy to acquire. Teachers and students must be trained in intensive practice to execute DA effectively. Wade (1994) believed that when students actively participate in class discussions and activities they can share ideas with their classmates and more effective learning takes place, respectively. Active and interactive participation among teachers and students are considered as building-blocks for effective learning processes in classroom practice. Students' willingness to participate in classroom tasks and activities can create a conducive classroom environment for successful

learning (Davis, 2009). Active students who participate in classroom tasks and activities understand their teachers better than passive students who do not participate effectively (Fassinger, 2000; Crombie, Pyke, Silverthorn, Jones, & Piccininn, 2003).

Liu (2001) categorized students' participation behaviors into four major types: *full integration*, *participation in the circumstances*, *marginal interaction*, and *silence observation*. Students are fully integrated when they engage actively in classroom activities and tasks in which they know what to do to complete their activities or tasks. Students participate based on the circumstances when they participate and interact with other students and their teacher less than full integration and participate when they are ready and only at an appropriate time. When students prefer to listen more and take notes than engage actively in classroom practice, they show marginal participation behavior. In silent observation behavior, students avoid participation in classroom tasks and activities and act as receivers of delivered materials in the classroom.

2.2 Related Studies

Menzel and Carrell (1999) studied the relationship between instructor and students' biological sex and students' willingness to participate in classroom practice. The study showed that the instructor and students' biological sex has not significantly related to students' willingness to participate but the instructor's *verbal immediacy* was positively related to students' willingness to participate. Also, they found that students' willingness to participate was positively correlated with their understanding of their learning process.

Prentice and Kramer (2006) investigated students' participation in classroom practice in a qualitative study. They found that students' participation is influenced by some factors including their classmates, their teacher, and their personality and self-image. Also, the study showed that there is a *dialectical tension* between their willingness to participate and their desire to remain silent when they are exposed to the teacher's feedback and their classmates' pressure.

Anton (2009) investigated the DA of advanced second language learners and the understanding of diagnostic assessment in an advanced Spanish language program. The researcher implemented DA procedures to measure language capability and proved interventions for documenting learners' progress. The analysis of the findings indicated that dynamic assessment provides a more profound and comprehensive account of the students' real and potential abilities, which provides the programs with the opportunity of developing individualized educational policies adjusted for the students' needs.

Lantolf and Poehner (2011) investigated the implementation of interventionist DA in a combined fourth and fifth-grade Spanish classroom. Standardized prompts were used as mediation. DA implemented into classroom routine practice without changing instructional objectives by teaching based on the learners' ZPD. The study showed that implementation of interventionist DA has a positive effect on promoting the learners' ZPD.

Hadigheh and Khaghaninezhad (2012) investigated the effect of dynamic assessment on the general English test performance of Iranian medical students. The researchers used mediation based on the DA process to teach participants in the form of a series of individualistic interviews. The researchers found that all participants had improved their performance by receiving DA mediation in their instructional period.

Jarrahzadeh and Tabatabaei (2014) investigated the impact of DA on promoting the reading comprehension ability of Iranian male and female EFL learners. The researchers used a unified DA approach which integrates instruction and assessment to provide learners with mediation. The study showed that employing the DA approach in the classroom can promote the learners' reading comprehension skill effectively.

Hessamy and Ghaderi (2014) studied the role of interventionist approach to DA on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. The sandwich format of DA was used in the study. This study revealed that implementing an interventionist approach to DA positively enhanced both test performance and vocabulary learning of learners.

Malmeer and Zoghi (2014) investigated the effect of an interactionist model of DA on the grammar ability of Iranian EFL learners of different age groups. The study revealed that implementing DA intervention in grammar teaching classroom has a statistically significant positive influence on promoting Iranian EFL learners' grammar ability.

Wang (2015) investigated the effect of DA on promoting learners' listening skill. A cake format DA was used in this study. The researcher mediated the learners' performances in action based on the problems they faced in the study. This study revealed that DA has a productive effect on learners' listening skill development.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

In this study, 28 out of 41 available intermediate Iranian EFL learners, males (N=11) and females (N=17) with the age range of 14 to 18 were selected from private institutes in Sari. They were randomly divided into interventionist (N=14) and interactionist DA (N=14) groups based on their performance on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). The learners' experi-

ence in language learning was at least two years. A convenience sampling procedure was conducted for the subject selection.

3.2. Instruments

OPT. This test was applied to homogenize language learners in the present study. It comprised 60 items in two parts. These parts are designed for vocabulary/grammar (40 items) and reading comprehension (20 items). The reliability of OPT has been confirmed by many Iranian ELT researchers (Hamidi, Babajani Azizi, & Kazemian, 2022).

Learners' Willingness to Participate in Classroom Activities (WTPCA) Questionnaire. The researchers designed WTPCA questionnaire to measure learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities level. The questionnaire comprised 20 items in a Likert scale format. The researchers piloted this questionnaire and calculated its reliability by using the Cronbach alpha formula which was about 0.84, respectively.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The data of this study were collected through the following procedure. At first, an OPT test was administered to a subject pool of 41, but only 28 participants could meet the criteria. They were randomly classified into interventionist and interactionist groups with 14 learners in each. Next, to measure their WTPCA level before the instructional phase, the WTPCA questionnaire was distributed to the participants as a pre-test. They were assured of confidentiality and ethical issues for the answer they provided. During the instructional phase, the interventionist group was exposed to the interventionist DA in which the researchers used *graduated prompt* and *testing the limits* techniques. For the interactionist DA group, the researchers used leading questions, hints, or prompts that were not pre-planned in advance. The instructional phase lasted eight sessions, each one around 90 minutes two days a week. To measure their WTPCA level after the instructional phase, we distributed the WTPCA questionnaire among the participants as a post-test.

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of the First Research Question

The descriptive statistics for the interventionist group is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

The Descriptive Statistics for Interventionist Group Pre- and Post-Test Scores

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Variance
Interventionist Pre	14	44	40	84	63.14	12.384	153.363
Interventionist Post	14	46	37	83	63.71	12.875	165.758
Valid N (listwise)	14						

As can be seen in Table 1 above, the means for the interventionist group are 63.14 and 63.71, respectively. Next, the normality calculation is shown.

Table 2

Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality for the Interventionist Group Pre- and Post-Tests Scores

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Interventionist Pre	.984	14	.992
Interventionist Post	.975	14	.934

As can be seen in Table 2, the sig values for interventionist group pre and post-test scores are .992 and .934, respectively. Since both of the sig values are more than 0.05 (.992 > 0.05 and .934 > 0.05), the two sets of scores are normally distributed. The researchers used a parametric test for comparing the two means i.e. the Paired-samples t-test.

Table 3

The Inferential Statistics for the Interventionist Group Pre and Post-Tests Scores

		Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Interventionist Pre Interventionist Post	-2.555	1.412	-.622	13	.544

As can be seen, the sig value is **.544**. Since the obtained sig value is more than 0.05 (.544 > 0.05), it can be concluded that this sig value is not statistically significant and the observed difference between the two means is not meaningful.

4.2. Analysis of Second Research Question

The descriptive statistics for the interactionist group pre- and post-test scores are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

The Descriptive Statistics for the Interactionist Group Pre and Post-Tests Scores

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Variance	
Interactionist Pre	14	39	44	83	59.21	12.236	149.720	
Interactionist Post	14	31	54	85	65.86	10.302	106.132	
Valid N (listwise)	14							

As can be seen in Table 1 above, the means for interventionist group pre- and post-test scores are 59.21 and 65.86, respectively. Next, the normality calculation is presented.

Table 5

Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality for Interactionist Group Pre- and Post-Test Scores

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Interactionist Pre	.917	14	.202
Interactionist Post	.899	14	.108

As can be seen in Table 5, the sig values for interactionist group pre and post-test scores are .202 and .108, respectively. Since both of the sig values are more than 0.05 (.202 > 0.05 and .108 > 0.05), it can be concluded that two sets of scores are normally distributed. The researchers used a parametric test for comparing two means, i.e., the Paired-Samples t-test.

Table 6

The Inferential Statistics for the Interactionist Group Pre- and Post-Test Scores

		Paired Differences				
		95% Confidence				
		Interval of the Dif-		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		ference				
		Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Interactionist Pre Interactionist Post	-8.992	-4.294	-6.109	13	.000

As can be seen, the sig value is .000. Since the obtained sig value is less than 0.05 (.000 < 0.05), it can be concluded that this sig value is statistically significant, and the observed difference between the two means is meaningful.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As mentioned before, the current study tried to find out the effect of interventionist and interactionist dynamic assessment on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities. The first finding was that interventionist DA did not have a significant effect on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities. One possible reason for this finding is maybe the nature of interventionist DA. The mediation process of interventionist DA is based on standardized steps in which mediate learners holistically not individually. Therefore, it cannot make them motivated enough to increase their WTPCA level significantly. As mentioned by Lantolf and Poehner (2004), in interventionist DA, the extent of assistance needed for mediating the learners to achieve intended and pre-designed learning objectives measures learning speed and development. In the interventionist approach to DA, the mediation is based on a standardized design provided during an assessment moving from pure implicit mediation at one continuum to pure explicit mediation at the other end. So the standardized nature of interventionist DA is somehow predictable for students and maybe lacks the element of challenge for them. Thus, maybe interventionist DA cannot motivate students to participate highly in their classroom tasks and activities.

The second finding was that interactionist DA had a significant effect on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities. The possible reason for this finding is the fact that the interactionist DA is concerned with the development of an individual learner or even a group of learners (Poehner, 2008). The interaction process of interactionist DA can consistent with each learner's performance fluctuation and the assessor can regulate his/her mediation according to the learner's unique characteristics. It makes the learners highly motivated to participate and engage in classroom learning activities. The interactionist DA followed an unpredictable pattern for mediating students in their learning practice. So the students tend to be more active in their learning process and their motivation increased for participating in learning practice. As Poehner (2008) believed, the interactionist orientation is more consistent with Vygotsky's perspective on education which is believed that the best way to assess the psychological process of learning and cognitive development of learners is a qualitative, negotiated, and dynamic approach to assessment. During the process of the interactionist type of mediation, the mediator reacts to the learners' needs and continuously re-tuned and refined the structure of mediation to match better with the situation.

Through applying the interactionist DA practice in the classroom, students are more involved in their learning process and their capabilities for dealing with psychologically blocking factors increased because such an approach can provide a learner-friendly atmosphere for assessment. When students receive interactionist DA practice, they feel that there are some help and support from their teacher in their problematic area of learning. Hence, their stress reduces, their confidence is enhanced, and they are determined to participate more than before in classroom practice.

As Ableeva (2008) believed, reciprocity (students' responsiveness to the teacher) is the necessary factor for teacher mediation. The reciprocity component of mediation enables the teacher to adjust mediation to produce needed cognitive changes in the learner's performance and abilities. Such reciprocity is more undertaken in the interactionist DA approach in which there are mutual and meaningful interactions between teacher and students. Hence, the interactionist DA process and procedure can facilitate students' classroom interaction and engagement and their WTPCA level, respectively. In addition, another important factor in interactionist DA practice is the learners' awareness of their learning problems and difficulties. In such practice, they clearly figure out their own specific learning challenges and problems and it can be helpful for them to understand their learning tasks and activities and generally learn practice better. It can enable them to be more active in their classroom and lead them to a higher level of WTPCA.

This study revealed that the interventionist DA did not have a significant effect on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities and interactionist DA had a significant effect on promoting learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities. Regarding these findings, it is worth saying that implementing interactionist DA in language classrooms can enhance learners' WTPCA. By implementing DA in classroom, teachers can use assessment as a tool for instruction or in other words, *assessment for learning* not *assessment of learning*. Regarding the significant role of social interaction in mediating learning, Ellis (2000) believed that the presence and the help of another person are needed for language learners to carry out and operate new language tasks and activities. Such an interaction can help them to internalize how to do the tasks and activities. Such an interactional pattern is seen clearly in the DA procedure.

As a matter of fact, classroom interaction and participation are two-sided and mutually interlinked (between teacher and students) in their nature. It is important to note that, the unidirectional and one-way interactional track between teacher and students cannot be considered an effective and pedagogically beneficent participation pattern in language classrooms. Thus, using DA practice by language teachers in classroom could be a productive action for promoting students' participation in classroom practice. Therefore, it is valuable advice for language teachers, language learners, syllabus designers, and language policymakers to implement such an approach in their process of teaching and learning. Moreover, it can be beneficial for teacher educators to be aware of the necessity of training teachers who can provide mediation for learners to make better learning situations and opportunities for them.

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