

Research Article

Dynamic Assessment and Iranian EFL Learners' Knowledge of Passive Voice in Speaking Tasks

Bahar Babaei *¹, Iraj Montashery²

^{1,2} *English Translation Department, Lahijan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Lahijan, Iran*

*Corresponding author: babaei.baharbl@gmail.com

(Received: 2024/05/20; Accepted: 2024/08/14)

Online publication: 2024/11/10

Abstract

The present investigation aimed to examine the impact of dynamic assessment on the acquisition of passive voice in a speaking context among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To this end, forty intermediate-level learners from a Language Institute in Lahijan were randomly chosen to participate in the study through the administration of an OPT. The study employed a pre/post-test design with two participant groups: experimental and control. Speaking proficiency was assessed using four instruments: EIT, TGJT, UGJT, and a focused communication task, all administered orally. The experimental group engaged in task-based interactions with their interlocutors while receiving dynamic assessment interventions. Conversely, the control group completed the same tasks, but their instruction focused on explicit form of correction. After the intervention phase, the participants in both groups were administered a post-test of speaking proficiency. This post-test utilized the identical four measures employed in the pre-test. A battery of statistical analyses, encompassing t-tests and ANOVA with Pearson correlation coefficients, was conducted to assess group differences. The results yielded statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the groups. These findings suggest that Dynamic Assessment (DA) may be a more effective intervention strategy than the Focus on Form approach. The study concludes by exploring the broader implications of these results for language learning pedagogy.

Keywords: dynamic assessment, zone of proximal development, passive voice, speaking skill, EFL learners

Introduction

Since the advent of Vygotskian socio-cultural theory (SCT), classroom dynamic assessment (DA) has gained popularity because it has opened windows of golden opportunities to unify instruction and evaluation to promote learners' language development. In fact, learners' mistakes in the L2 classroom provide insights into their educational needs and allow the teachers to mediate. The mediation takes place dialogically between a teacher and learners. Like a spectrum of lights, verbal prompts are used by teachers, from being initially implicit to eventually explicit, to mediate according to learners' needs (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). These prompts are designed to diagnose the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD). While the contingent and graduated nature of Dynamic Assessment (DA) can present challenges, instructors must develop the ability to infer learners' current level of understanding, which allows them to provide targeted forms of mediation to promote learners' awareness and control of the target language. This zone of proximal development (ZPD), defined by Lantolf and Poehner (2004), represents the gap between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can achieve with appropriate support. Within the Dynamic Assessment (DA) framework, a progressive decrease in the explicitness and frequency of prompts signifies learner development. This trend indicates a shift from other-regulation to self-regulation, reflecting enhanced learner autonomy and improved control over the target language (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Lantolf, 2012).

Dynamic Assessment (DA) capitalizes on the interactive nature of spoken language acquisition. During learner-teacher interactions, strategically timed interventions provide targeted assistance as learners grapple with communicative tasks (Poehner & Lantolf, 2003). This characteristic aligns well with the inherently interactive nature of speaking proficiency, demonstrably fostered through interaction (Son & Kim, 2017; Willis, 2015). Given its centrality in human communication, oral proficiency is widely considered the ultimate goal of language learning (Lazarton, 2001). Thus, DA offers a valuable tool for assessment and development in this domain. However, time constraints and reciprocity can negatively impact speaking fluency (Bygate, 1987). Brown (2001) further emphasizes the multifaceted nature of speaking skills, encompassing grammatical accuracy, which the present study partially addressed.

The issue in education emerges when conventional teaching methods neglect learners' potential and do not take a more comprehensive approach to

learning into account. Moreover, not all abilities are addressed equally in teaching English as a foreign language. According to Brown and Yule (1983), language instruction has primarily focused on studying written language throughout history. Similarly, Myhill et al. (2006) claim that our assessment system is still mainly written and that we value reading and writing more than speaking skills. According to a study by Liao (2009), even though talking is a part of the curriculum for teaching English in higher education institutions, only a minority of the class period is spent on activities that allow students to interact with one another in English.

Focusing primarily on Iranian EFL learners, the lack of non-native speakers of English reduces Iranian EFL learners' chances to improve their speaking skills, which makes them unable to communicate easily in English. Narrowing this skill down, grammar appears as an obstacle at higher levels since, due to not being autonomously instructed, learners suffer from a lack of preparation or retention, which makes this component demanding and heart-poundingly stressful for them to utilize. Hence, we want to ask the help of DA to solve this prolonged historical problem of students.

Poehner (2008) highlights the significance of learner reciprocity during Dynamic Assessment (DA) tasks. This reciprocity, manifested through asking questions, discussing challenges, proposing alternatives, and evaluating solutions, transcends a simple "right/wrong" assessment. By analyzing the full range of learner responses to mediation, we gain insights into their level of engagement with the task and overall participation in the collaborative activity. The mediator in this study will pay particular attention to how the learners' performance on the passive voice tenses changes from moment to moment. More precisely, their increased reciprocity and decreased use of the mediator's mediational maneuvers will signify their advancement by moving towards self-regulation, which is the ultimate objective of DA. Pawlak (2021) underscores the distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical application of the English passive voice. While proficiency in passive voice formation and comprehension is foundational, spontaneous communication demands a more sophisticated skillset. Learners must grasp the semantic and pragmatic implications of the passive voice and achieve fluency in its natural integration within spoken discourse. Recent studies have shown that instruction to promote implicit learning can produce implicit and explicit knowledge (Isbell & Rogers, 2021; Rebuschat & Williams, 2012; Rogers, 2017). Assessing results beyond explicit knowledge to understand better and compare the impacts of implicit and explicit learning is unquestionably crucial.

A critical review of existing literature reveals a gap in research investigating the impact of Dynamic Assessment (DA) on EFL learners' speaking accuracy, particularly regarding passive voice (the present study's focus). While prior studies have explored the applicability of DA to various language skills, the specific effect on speaking accuracy with a focus on the passive voice remains under investigation. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the effectiveness of DA in enhancing EFL learners' speaking ability, specifically in their use of the be-passive voice, the most common passive voice construction in English. In light of the research gap as mentioned above, the following research question is raised:

Does dynamic assessment in speaking tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of English passive voice?

As sub-questions:

1. Does dynamic assessment in speaking tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' explicit productive knowledge of passive voice?
2. Does dynamic assessment in speaking tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' explicit receptive knowledge of passive voice?
3. Does dynamic assessment in speaking tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' implicit productive knowledge of passive voice?
4. Does dynamic assessment in speaking tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' implicit receptive knowledge of passive voice?

Method

Participants

This study investigates the effects of Dynamic Assessment (DA) on the speaking ability of intermediate-level EFL learners. The participants were forty non-English major students aged 18-25 enrolled in a language institute in Lahijan. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) for language learners was administered to identify the students scoring one standard deviation below and above the mean. These students were then randomly assigned to two groups: one experimental group receiving DA intervention (DA) and one control group receiving focus on Form instruction (FonF), including 20 participants. Both groups were taught by the same instructor with an MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and 15 years of experience to ensure consistency in the educational context. The instructor's TEFL background ensured familiarity with DA concepts and models.

Materials and Instruments

Target structure

While English possesses various passive voice constructions, including the *be-passive*, *get-passive*, and *have-passive*, the current study exclusively investigates the *be-passive*. This focus is warranted as the *be-passive* represents the prototypical form within the English passive voice system.

Explicit and Implicit L2 Knowledge Tests (Speaking pre-test and post-test)

Four instruments were used to measure the participants' explicit and implicit productive and receptive knowledge to gain the learners' understanding of the targeted feature: EIT, UGJT, time-constrained FCT, and TGJT.

Elicited Imitation Test (EIT)

The Elicited Imitation Test (EIT) task assessed learners' explicit productive knowledge of the *be-passive* voice. This task consisted of 15 aurally presented sentences, primarily featuring regular verbs, that varied in length (6-13 syllables) and grammaticality (8 correct, 7 incorrect). However, the average size for both grammatical and ungrammatical sentences was identical. During the individually administered EI task, the participants vocally repeated each sentence after a 6-second delay to minimize immediate repetition and reliance on rote memory (McDade et al., 1982, as cited in Spada et al., 2015). A visual prompt ("Please repeat now") on a PowerPoint slide signaled the start of the repetition window. The scoring employed a 0-1 point scale based on error severity, with deductions of 0.5 points for tense or aspect mistakes and 0 points for complete omission of the passive voice or a key component. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Ellis et al., 2006), reaction time was not controlled, potentially allowing the participants to draw upon their explicit knowledge.

Untimed Grammaticality Judgment Tests (UGJT)

The study utilized a computer-based judgment task delivered via PowerPoint to assess participants' explicit receptive knowledge of the *be-passive* voice. This task comprised 15 sentences, of which 11 (73%) were grammatically correct. Participants were instructed to evaluate the grammaticality of each sentence and provide justifications for their decisions in cases of perceived errors. The scoring adopted a 0-1 point system based on both the accuracy of the judgment and the quality of the justification provided. The responses lacking justification or containing an incorrect

explanation incurred a 0.5-point deduction. For illustrative purposes, two sample items from this test are presented below.

They haven't seen each other since then. (correct).

The new blue car is fitted with an alarm. (incorrect)

Focused Communication Task

Focused tasks are identical to information and opinion gap tasks of this type, but they are different from them because they have been created specifically to provide opportunities for applying a particular target structure (Ellis, 2022). The study employed a focused communication task (Ellis, 2003) to assess implicit productive knowledge of the be-passive voice. Under time pressure (2 minutes preparation, 4 minutes execution), the participants described a house in New York City using 15 provided prompts. The limited time frame suggests that participants primarily relied on implicit (automatized) knowledge. The task was completed individually with audio recordings capturing their oral production. The scoring reflected the number of prompts addressed (maximum 15 points), with each prompt-related utterance receiving 0, 0.5, or 1 point based on accuracy. A sample prompts is included below.

Locate the suburbs near a beautiful lake and park, surrounded by a garden, can see from the highway

Timed Grammaticality Judgment Test (TGJT)

This study employed a timed grammaticality judgment test (TGJT) to assess implicit receptive knowledge of the be-passive voice. The participants judged the grammaticality of 15 sentences in a PowerPoint slideshow (73% correct), mirroring the design used by Ellis (2005, as cited in Erlam & Wei, 2021) for its potential as a more substantial measure of implicit knowledge. They averaged seven seconds of sentence presentation time, with some adjustments based on sentence length. The scoring was straightforward, with each response receiving 0 points (incorrect) or 1 point (correct), eliminating the need for inter-rater reliability analysis. Two examples of both accurate and inaccurate sentences from this test are provided below.

They have been seen together once or twice.

The trade unions have asked for fuel prices to reduce.

Operationalizing Implicit and Explicit L2 Knowledge

The test order followed a strict protocol to minimize performance biases. Implicit knowledge assessments came before explicit ones to

reduce the chance that recalling rules would later influence the target structure's use. Similarly, the production tasks preceded the reception tasks to avoid priming participants with passive voice structures.

Dynamic assessment regulatory scale Mediation/treatment

Given that the research focuses on individual feedback, scaffolding, and identification/enhancement of learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the regulatory scale framework emerged as the most suitable Dynamic Assessment (DA) approach for this study. This selection aligns with Aljaafreh and Lantolf's (1994) work, which similarly investigated grammatical aspects, a core focus of the present study. Inspired by their model, this investigation applies the regulatory scale to assess the participant EFL learners' speaking proficiency dynamically. The scale, detailed in Table 1, offers a range of interventions, progressing from implicit to explicit support, to gauge their effectiveness in enhancing learners' speaking abilities.

Table 1

Regulatory Scale- Implicit to Explicit (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994, p.471)

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tutor asks the learner to read, find the errors, and correct them independently, prior to the tutorial. 2. Construction of a "collaborative frame" prompted by the presence of the tutor as a potential dialogic partner. 3. Prompted or focused reading of the sentence that contains the error by the learner or the tutor. 4. Tutor indicates that something may be wrong in a segment (e.g., sentence, clause, line)- "Is there anything wrong in this sentence?" 5. Tutor rejects unsuccessful attempts at recognizing the error. 6. Tutor narrows down the location of the error (e.g., tutor repeats or points to the specific segment which contains the error). 7. Tutor indicates the nature of the error, but does not identify the error (e.g., "There is something wrong with the tense marking here"). 8. Tutor identifies the error ("You can't use an auxiliary here"). 9. Tutor rejects learner's unsuccessful attempts at correcting error. 10. Tutor provides clues to help the learner arrive at the correct form (e.g., "It is not really past but something that is still going on"). 11. Tutor provides the correct form. 12. Tutor provides some explanation for use of the correct form. 13. Tutor provides examples of the correct pattern when other forms of help fail to produce an appropriate responsive action. |
|--|

Beliefs About Grammar Instruction

The study employed an instrument developed by Pawlak (2021) to gauge the participants' beliefs regarding grammar instruction. Three sections make up the questionnaire. The first section dealt with demographics, with the main goals of gathering background data on gender, program level, self-evaluation of TL mastery in general and about

particular skills and subsystems, the grade in the grammar course at the end of the previous semester, and regular access to English outside of class. For one of the attitude questions in this part, the students were asked to rank the significance of understanding grammar on a scale of 1 to 5. 30 Likert-scale items about the participants' attitudes in the six areas listed below made up the tool's core. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha value (0.92) shows excellent internal consistency and reliability (Pawlak, 2021).

Procedure

A quantitative data collection method was established to determine how the interactionist DA enhanced learners' knowledge of English passive voice. The present study used a pre-test, mediation, and post-test approach to ascertain any potential effects of the interactionist DA on the learners' speaking ability. The instructional intervention consisted of eight sessions delivered bi-weekly across a four-week timeframe. Each session was designed to be concise, ranging from ten to twenty minutes. Before the start of the lesson, the pre-test was administered. The experimental group was subsequently given the teaching with the interactionist mediation of DA. The participants in the control group got the same content. There was no step-by-step mediation, however. The researcher gave the students in her group the recast as feedback, which is part of the procedure accepted in the application of Focus on Form. In other words, the researchers employed a scaffolding approach, strategically providing prompts and hints that progressively increased in explicitness. This tiered support system aimed to guide the learners towards the correct answer within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Both groups took a speaking posttest at the end of the treatment, and the results were rated using the scoring standards previously indicated. The research questions were addressed using the relevant scores. The quantitative data for the study were gathered using speaking exams, which were based on explicit and implicit knowledge measures. Finally, the beliefs about grammar instruction questionnaire developed by (Pawlak, 2021) was used to examine the participants' perceptions regarding grammar instruction.

Data analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted on the oral test data. This analysis encompassed the calculation of the mean scores and their corresponding percentages for the experimental and control groups, along with standard deviations. A t-test and ANOVA were employed to assess group differences. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software facilitated

the statistical analysis. Additionally, Pearson correlations were computed to explore potential relationships between the six domains of grammar instruction beliefs and the productive and receptive aspects of explicit and implicit (highly automatized) knowledge of the English passive voice.

Results

Reliability of the Tests and Beliefs about GI

A series of reliability analyses were conducted on the sample population to establish the internal consistency of the instruments employed in this study. Table 2 presents the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the four tests and the Beliefs about Grammar Instruction (GI) questionnaire. DeVellis (1991) suggests that alpha values between .65 and .70 indicate acceptable reliability, while those ranging from .70 to .80 demonstrate good reliability and high internal consistency. As evident in Table 2, all alpha coefficients for the tests and questionnaire exceed .80, signifying strong reliability within the present learner group.

Table 2
Reliability Values of the Tests and Beliefs about GI

Variables	$\alpha > 0.7$ Cronbach's Alpha
Implicit productive	0.89
Implicit receptive	0.95
Explicit productive	0.73
Explicit receptive	0.84
Beliefs about GI—subscales	0.92

Descriptive findings of research variables

In Table 3, the descriptive indices of the research variables in the pre-test and post-test are reported by groups, including the mean and standard deviation. In Table 4, the results of this test to check the normality of the data distribution are reported.

The equivalence of the two groups at baseline was verified through independent-sample t-tests conducted on the pre-test scores for each level (Test and Control). Descriptive statistics for these pre-tests are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Furthermore, skewness analysis was employed to assess normality in the distribution of scores within each group. The tables show that the calculated skewness values divided by their respective standard errors fell within the acceptable range of ± 1.96 , indicating that the normality assumption was met.

Table 3
Descriptive Indices of the Research Variables by DA Group (n=40)

		Implicit productive	Implicit receptive	Explicit productive	Explicit receptive
N	Valid	40	40	40	40
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		7.463	8.150	7.713	8.575
Skewness		.036	.035	.097	-.013
Std. Error of Skewness		.374	.374	.374	.374
Kurtosis		-1.442	-1.318	-1.619	-1.327
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.733	.733	.733	.733
Minimum		1.5	1.0	1.5	1.0
Maximum		14.0	15.0	14.0	15.0

Table 4
Descriptive Indices of the Research Variables by Control Group (n=40)

		Implicit productive	Implicit receptive	Explicit productive	Explicit receptive
N	Valid	40	40	40	40
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		6.663	7.450	6.813	8.100
Skewness		.539	.643	.015	.212
Std. Error of Skewness		.374	.374	.374	.374
Kurtosis		-1.142	-.889	-1.569	-1.052
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.733	.733	.733	.733
Minimum		2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0
Maximum		13.0	15.0	13.5	14.5

Independent samples t-test (various components of DA)

The Levene's test results in Table 5 confirm the homogeneity of variance for explicit productive ($p = 0.09$), explicit receptive ($p = 0.48$), implicit productive ($p = 0.47$), and implicit receptive ($p = 0.76$) knowledge, thereby fulfilling the assumptions for a t-test. The observed t-values (all exceeding the 0.05 significance level: $t = -0.16$, $df = 38$, $p = 0.09$; $t = -13.06$, $df = 38$, $p = 0.48$; $t = -11.65$, $df = 38$, $p = 0.47$; $t = -13.38$, $df = 38$, $p = 0.76$) reveal no statistically significant differences between the DA groups in terms of the investigated knowledge types.

Table 5
Independent Samples Test for DA Group

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower		Upper
Implicit productive pre	Equal variances assumed	.522	.475	-11.650	38	.000	-7.3750	.6331	-8.6565	-6.0935
	Equal variances not assumed			-11.650	37.900	.000	-7.3750	.6331	-8.6567	-6.0933
Implicit receptive pre	Equal variances assumed	.093	.762	-13.381	38	.000	-8.2000	.6128	-9.4406	-6.9594
	Equal variances not assumed			-13.381	37.697	.000	-8.2000	.6128	-9.4409	-6.9591
Explicit productive pre	Equal variances assumed	1.258	.097	-16.721	38	.000	-7.8750	.4710	-8.8284	-6.9216
	Equal variances not assumed			-16.721	34.508	.000	-7.8750	.4710	-8.8316	-6.9184
Explicit receptive pre	Equal variances assumed	.498	.485	-13.060	38	.000	-8.0500	.6161	-9.2973	-6.8027
	Equal variances not assumed			-13.060	37.997	.000	-8.0500	.6161	-9.2973	-6.8027

The Levene's test results for homogeneity of variance, presented in Table 6, confirms equal variances across all knowledge types: explicit productive

($p = 0.91 > 0.05$), explicit receptive ($p = 0.09 > 0.05$), implicit productive ($p = 0.07 > 0.05$), and implicit receptive ($p = 0.43 > 0.05$). This satisfies the assumptions for a t-test. Subsequent t-tests (all p-values exceeding the 0.05 significance level: $t = -15.84$, $df = 38$, $p = 0.91$; $t = -10.74$, $df = 38$, $p = 0.09$; $t = -8.79$, $df = 38$, $p = 0.07$; $t = -9.86$, $df = 38$, $p = 0.59$) revealed no statistically significant differences between the control groups in terms of any of the investigated knowledge types.

Table 6
Independent Samples Test for the Control Group

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differ- ence	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Implicit productive pre	Equal variances assumed	2.155	.070	-8.797	38	.000	-5.6750	.6451	-6.9809	-4.3691
	Equal variances not assumed			-8.797	25.026	.000	-5.6750	.6451	-7.0035	-4.3465
Implicit receptive pre	Equal variances assumed	0.593	.432	-9.868	38	.000	-6.9000	.6992	-8.3156	-5.4844
	Equal variances not assumed			-9.868	22.549	.000	-6.9000	.6992	-8.3481	-5.4519
Explicit productive pre	Equal variances assumed	.013	.910	-15.843	38	.000	-7.4750	.4718	-8.4301	-6.5199
	Equal variances not assumed			-15.843	37.991	.000	-7.4750	.4718	-8.4301	-6.5199
Explicit receptive pre	Equal variances assumed	1.148	.091	-10.740	38	.000	-6.6000	.6145	-7.8440	-5.3560

pre	Equal					
	variances	not	-10.74034	.017	.000	-6.6000
	assumed					.6145 -7.8488-5.3512

Table 7 presents the results of the ANOVA test for both DA and FOF groups.

Table 7
ANOVA for DA and FOF Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Explicit productive post	Between Groups	12.100	1	12.100	4.668	.037
	Within Groups	98.500	38	2.592		
	Total	110.600	39			
Explicit receptive post	Between Groups	19.600	1	19.600	4.852	.034
	Within Groups	153.500	38	4.039		
	Total	173.100	39			
Implicit productive post	Between Groups	27.225	1	27.225	4.788	.035
	Within Groups	216.050	38	5.686		
	Total	243.275	39			
Implicit receptive post	Between Groups	44.100	1	44.100	10.586	.002
	Within Groups	158.300	38	4.166		
	Total	202.400	39			

As indicated in Table 7, the significant main effects were observed for all knowledge types (explicit productive: $F(4.66, 38) = p < 0.05$; explicit receptive: $F(4.852, 38) = p < 0.05$; implicit productive: $F(4.78, 38) = p < 0.05$; implicit receptive: $F(10.58, 38) = p < 0.05$). These findings reject the null hypothesis of no pre-test to post-test score differences within both the control and DA groups. Therefore, if the dynamic assessment is integrated with teaching, DA leads to acquiring more explicit/implicit receptive and productive knowledge of passive voice among Iranian EFL learners in the context of speaking practice.

Table 8 presents Pearson correlation coefficients examining the relationships between grammar instruction beliefs and learner performance on the four knowledge measures (explicit/implicit production & reception).

Table 8
Correlations among Different Domains of Beliefs and the Measures of Speaking (N = 40)

Beliefs about GI—subscales	Explicit productive	Explicit receptive	Implicit productive	Implicit receptive
Overall importance of grammar instruction	-0.30*	-0.20	-0.23	-0.08
Design of the syllabus	-0.13	0.07	0.08	0.04
Planning grammar-oriented lessons	-0.16	0.09	-0.14	-0.19
Introducing grammar structures	0.11	0.15	0.06	0.12
Practicing grammar structures	-0.12	-0.04	-0.01	0.01
Correcting errors in the use of grammar structures	0.09	0.01	0.01	0.06

Note *indicates a statistically significant value at 0.05

Regarding explicit productive knowledge, positive, albeit weak, correlations emerged with beliefs about introducing grammar structures ($r = 0.11$) and providing corrective feedback ($r = 0.09$). For explicit receptive knowledge, weak positive correlations were observed with beliefs concerning syllabus design ($r = 0.07$), planning grammar lessons ($r = 0.09$), and introducing grammar structures ($r = 0.15$), as well as correction ($r = 0.01$). Shifting to implicit knowledge, scores on the productive test demonstrated weak positive correlations with syllabus design ($r = 0.08$) and introducing grammar structures ($r = 0.06$). Interestingly, a negative correlation emerged between this test and beliefs about overall grammar importance ($r = -0.23$) and planning grammar lessons ($r = -0.14$), suggesting these beliefs may hinder

implicit knowledge development. Finally, implicit receptive knowledge scores displayed weak positive correlations with syllabus design ($r = 0.04$), introducing grammar structures ($r = 0.12$), practicing grammar structures ($r = 0.01$), and correcting errors ($r = 0.06$).

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Different Subscales and Measures (N= 40)

Beliefs about GI—subscales	Mean	Std. Deviation
overall importance of grammar instruction	38.08	2.59
Design of the syllabus	8.48	1.72
Planning grammar-oriented lessons	15.65	2.66
Introducing grammar structures	24.25	3.34
Practicing grammar structures	14.85	2.11
Correcting errors in the use of grammar structures	12.83	2.83
Mastery of the English passive—the four measures	M(SD) DA	M(SD) control
Explicit productive knowledge	7.71 (2.62)	6.81 (2.12)
Explicit receptive knowledge	8.57 (1.85)	8.10 (1.71)
Implicit productive knowledge	7.46 (3.05)	6.66 (1.07)
Implicit receptive knowledge	8.15 (1.82)	7.45 (1.32)

The DA group's average scores were superior to those of the FOF group, as evidenced by the findings. More crucially, regardless of whether they employed explicit or implicit knowledge of this grammatical feature, the participants' performance was better on the tests of comprehending the usage of the passive voice in English ($M = 7.71$ and 8.57 ; $M = 7.46$ and 8.15 , accordingly). Consistent with the expectation of greater cognitive demand, the implicit knowledge measures proved to be more challenging for the participants than those assessing explicit knowledge. This is reflected in the mean scores (production: $M = 7.46$ vs. 6.66 ; $M = 7.71$ vs. 6.81 ; reception: $M = 8.15$ vs. 7.45 ; $M = 8.57$ vs. 8.10). Furthermore, it is critical to recognize that the SD values indicate more excellent value in terms of productive than receptive English passive knowledge assessments.

Discussion

This investigation employed a four-pronged assessment battery to gauge the instructional impact on the participant EFL learners' implicit and explicit knowledge of the target features. The instruments, adapted from Pawlak's (2021) battery, comprised three tasks initially designed to assess implicit and explicit knowledge of grammatical structures including Focused Communication Task, Timed Grammatical Judgment Test (TGJT), and Untimed TGJT. These tasks were meticulously adapted to specifically target the knowledge types of interest in the present study. Additionally, the elicited imitation test (EIT), initially developed by Ellis to assess explicit grammatical knowledge, was further tailored to align with the specific target features under investigation.

Aligned with research questions one and two, the study examined the instructional impact on explicit knowledge of target features through performance on untimed grammatical judgment tests (GJT) and the elicited imitation test (EIT). The analysis revealed statistically significant group differences in explicit knowledge acquisition. The Dynamic Assessment (DA) intervention emerged as the superior instructional approach, demonstrably outperforming the Focus on Form approach in its ability to cultivate the students' implicit knowledge. Concerning research questions three and four, this investigation explored the influence of instructional approaches on the learners' implicit knowledge. The primary outcome measures were performance on timed grammatical judgment tests (TGJT) and focused communication tasks. The data analysis revealed statistically significant gains within the DA group from the pre-test to the post-test. Moreover, the DA intervention demonstrably surpassed the Focus on Form approach in its capacity to cultivate implicit knowledge acquisition.

Notably, potential discrepancies between the implicit and explicit knowledge test results may stem from the multifaceted nature of implicit knowledge development. De Graaff and Housen (2009) and Ellis (2006) highlight various contributing factors, including the salience and frequency of the language form within the input, its functional value (or redundancy), its linguistic domain (syntax, morphology, etc.), its level of similarity/contrast with the L1 equivalent, the regularity of the underlying rule, the processing mechanisms involved (item-based versus rule-based learning), and other elements.

This study agrees that speaking needs both explicit and implicit knowledge competence. As noted by Suzuki & DeKeyser (2017), since communicative interactions frequently occur in real-time, it is hypothesized that explicit knowledge that is at least partially automated may be required for both comprehension and production. More automatized explicit knowledge, which

can be deployed quickly, should be more advantageous in attending to the pertinent input.

Within the domain of receptive and productive grammar knowledge, Ellis et al. (2020) point out that grammar knowledge can manifest in both implicit and explicit forms, impacting both receptive and productive skills. Implicit knowledge, characterized by its intuitive, automatized nature, operates unconsciously and underpins fluent language use in comprehension and production. In contrast, explicit knowledge represents conscious awareness of linguistic rules and allows users to articulate their grammatical understanding.

The present investigation underscores the effectiveness of a scaffolding-based grammar instructional approach in promoting advancements in the learners' speaking abilities. These results are consistent with the findings from the study by Gerakopoulou (2011), which showed that scaffolding significantly influences EFL learners' speaking skills. This implies that interactions between teachers and students, including teacher support, might positively affect learners' speaking. Similar research was done by Moeen et al. (2019), who found that scaffolding and modeling by teachers significantly improve students' speaking correctness and fluency. His research supported the outcomes of the current study and demonstrated how the indirect instruction of grammar might increase speaking fluency. One of the core principles of communicative language education, which prioritizes teaching through interaction over direct grammar instruction, is that teaching language structure indirectly may improve speaking ability (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Ellis (2008), on the contrary, asserted that explicit instruction and an emphasis on form can help students do better on speaking accuracy exams. The current study's findings also indicated that explicit rule teaching through scaffolding has a more substantial impact on learners' speaking ability than implicit or indirect rule teaching. This can be explained by the increased connections between the learners' cognition and mental grammar regarding correctness and complexity (Ellis, 2008).

In terms of belief about grammar instruction, the students demonstrated knowledge of the general importance of grammar in learning L2, but they also showed a preference for the traditional methods of teaching this target language subsystem. Their preferences leaned towards a structured approach, favoring a sequential grammar syllabus aligned with the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) lesson format. Additionally, they expressed a desire for

explicit teacher instruction through rule presentations, controlled practice exercises targeting specific features, and immediate, direct error correction.

Overall, the analysis of the answers to the present questionnaire portrayed a positive reaction to both methods. It also showed enthusiasm for the changes in their practices due to their involvement in dynamic assessment and the focus on form. However, some of the answers also voiced reservations and limitations in reaction to task-based language teaching (Focus on Form), as some refrained from being convinced about the usefulness of TBLT and remained wondering how it would be better than the traditional PPP approach. Some expressed concerns about covering the grammar syllabus as a common concern when approaching TBLT.

Concerning their belief about grammar instruction, the students have shown a strong awareness of the importance of grammar when it comes to learning about language level, but they also seem very much inclined towards what is commonly taught by traditional approaches. Although these outcomes should not be considered as indicating that the participants dismiss the value of using grammatical structures in communicative contact, the observed patterns are extremely obvious and closely parallel the results of earlier studies (e.g., Jean & Simard, 2011; Mansouri et al., 2019; Pawlak, 2011, 2013, 2021; Schulz, 2001).

Considering the context in which the study was conducted, the observed patterns are not particularly unexpected. After all, it is frequently taught in English classrooms, with this instruction often referencing the structured curriculum and the PPP. Additionally, students who join English programs are supposedly forced to become familiar with various target language grammatical specifics, even those that are unlikely to be used in regular dialogue.

The findings align with the skill-learning theory (DeKeyser, 1998, 2007). This framework posits that automatized knowledge develops when learners encounter explicit representations of grammatical features and opportunities to utilize this knowledge in communicative settings where the features are repeatedly highlighted. Within this paradigm, practice facilitates the transformation of explicit knowledge into its implicit counterpart.

Doughty (2001) offers a possible explanation for the findings, suggesting that learners in the Focus on Forms (FonF) condition may have benefitted from a dual learning mechanism. First, exposure to passive voice exemplars within the tasks provided implicit input. Second, corrective recasts received during task performance likely served to focus attention on the passive voice and potentially highlight the gap between learners' usage and the target forms presented.

Conversely, the DA treatment demonstrably impacted explicit knowledge acquisition. The pre-test and post-test GJT scores revealed significant improvement. This suggests that exposure to mediational instructions bolstered the stability of explicitly taught target structures. The feedback provided concrete examples of the previously taught rules, likely facilitating the learners' ability to bridge the gap between the passive voice structures encountered during tasks and the abstract rules presented in explicit instruction.

This study investigated the efficacy of Dynamic Assessment (DA) in promoting Iranian EFL learners' speaking abilities. Specifically, it examined the applicability of Aljaafreh and Lantolf's (1994) regulatory scale within the EFL speaking skill development domain. The findings provide robust support for the effectiveness of DA in enhancing learners' spoken proficiency. Moreover, the research suggests that a DA approach empowers instructors to conduct more nuanced speaking assessments. By identifying the nature of learner errors through targeted interventions, educators can provide tailored support, ultimately leading to improved speaking skills. In light of these findings and those from similar studies, integrating DA into EFL pedagogy is strongly recommended. DA approaches demonstrably cultivate positive learning outcomes and equip teachers with the tools to refine their assessment and instructional practices. Furthermore, the study underscores the potential benefits of interactionist DA in bolstering the speaking abilities of intermediate EFL learners. Educators can further optimize learning gains by fostering opportunities for learner-teacher interaction and providing targeted assistance. The research also suggests a potential paradigm shift from traditional speaking assessment models that often prioritize psychometric quantification, neglecting the valuable insights gleaned from learner-teacher interaction and a developmental perspective.

Declaration of interest: none

References

- Aljaafreh, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (1994). Negative feedback as regulation and second language learning in the zone of proximal development. *Modern Language Journal*, 78(4), 465–483. <https://doi.org/10.2307/328585>
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Longman.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the spoken language: An approach based on the analysis of conversational English*. Cambridge University Press.

- Bygate, M. (1987). *Speaking: The Cambridge guide to teaching speaking to speakers of other languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DeKeyser, R. (1998). Beyond the focus on form: Cognitive perspectives on learning and practicing second language grammar. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 42–63). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- DeKeyser, R. (2007). Skill acquisition theory. In J. Williams & B. VanPatten (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction* (pp. 97–113). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- DeVellis, R. F. (1991). Scale development: Theory and applications. *Applied Social Research Methods Series*, 26.
- De Graaff, R., & Housen, A. (2009). Investigating the effects and effectiveness of L2 instruction. In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 726–750). John Wiley & Sons.
- Doughty, C. (2001). Cognitive underpinnings of focus on form. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 206–257). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2004). The definition and measurement of L2 explicit knowledge. *Language Learning*, 54, (pp. 227–275). 10.1111/j.0023-8333.2004.00260.x
- Ellis, R. (2005). Measuring implicit and explicit knowledge of a second language. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27, (pp. 141–172). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263105050096>
- Ellis, R. (2022). Rod Ellis's essential bookshelf: Focus on form. *Language Teaching*, 57(2), 246–261.
- Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28(2), 339–368.
- Ellis, R., Skehan, P., Li, S., Shintani, N., & Lambert, C. (2020). *Task-based language teaching: Theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Erlam, R., & Wei, L. (2021). The importance of increased processing demands in the design of Elicited Imitation tests. *Language Teaching Research, Language Teaching Research*, 28(4), 14721500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211026032>
- Gerakopoulou, O. (2011). Scaffolding oral interaction in a CLIL context: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 14(3), 275–289.

- Isbell, D. R., & Rogers, J. (2021). Measuring implicit and explicit learning and knowledge. In *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and language testing* (pp. 305-315). Routledge.
- Jean, G., & Simard, D. (2011). Grammar learning in English and French L2: Students' and teachers' beliefs and perceptions. *Foreign Language Annals*, 44, 465–492.
- Lantolf, J. P. (2012). Socio-cultural theory and L2: State of the art. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 34(2), 169–182. 10.1017/S0272263111000020
- Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2004). Dynamic assessment of L2 development: Bringing the past into the future. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 49–74.
- Lazarton, A. (2001). Teaching oral skills. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 103–115). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Liao, P. C. (2009). Using portfolio assessment to improve oral communication skills of university students. In Y. H. Gu & C. Hu (Eds.), *English language education in a global world: Practices, issues, and challenges* (pp. 87–97). Nova Science Publishers.
- Mansouri, B., Jami, P. Y., & Salmani, B. Y. (2019). Teachers and learners' views on isolated vs. integrated form-focused grammar instruction: A comparison of two contexts. *TESL-EJ*, 23, 1-18.
- Moeen, A. A., Nejadansari, D., & Azizolla Dabaghi, A. (2019). The impact of implicit vs explicit grammar teaching through scaffolding on Iranian learners' speaking achievement; focusing on fluency, accuracy, and complexity. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* 11(4), 800-813.
- Myhill, D., Jones, S., & Hopper, R. (2006). *Talking, listening and learning: Effective talk in the primary classroom*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Pawlak, M. (2011). Cultural differences in perceptions of form/focused instruction: The case of advanced Polish and Italian learners. In A. Wojtaszek & J. Arabski (Eds.), *Aspects of culture in second language acquisition and foreign language learning* (pp. 77–94). Springer.
- Pawlak, M. (2013). Comparing learners' and teachers' beliefs about form-focused instruction. In D. Gabrys-Barker, E. Piechurska-Kuciel, & J. Zybert (Eds.), *Investigations in teaching and learning languages: Studies in honor of Hanna Komorowska* (pp. 109–131). Springer.

- Pawlak, M. (2021). Beliefs about grammar instruction and the mastery of the English passive voice. In *Investigating Individual Learner Differences in Second Language Learning*, 173-188. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Poehner, M. E. (2008). *Dynamic assessment: A Vygotskian approach to understanding and promoting second language development*. Springer.
- Poehner, M. E., & Lantolf, J. P. (2003). Dynamic assessment in the language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 7(3), 265–291.
- Rebuschat, P., & Williams, J. N. (2012). Implicit and explicit knowledge in second language acquisition. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 33, 829-856. doi:10.1017/S0142716411000580
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Rogers, S. L. (2017). Implicit and explicit knowledge: A comparison of English learners' performances on tests of implicit and explicit L2 knowledge. *Language Teaching Research*, 21(2), 131–152.
- Schulz, R. (2001). Cultural differences in student and teacher perceptions concerning the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback: USA-Colombia. *Modern Language Journal*, 85, 244–258.
- Son, J. S., & Kim, Y. S. (2017). Developing spoken fluency: A study of teacher-learner interaction in a communicative, task-based EFL classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 21(4), 463–482.
- Spada, N., Jessop, L., Tomita, Y., Suzuki, W., & Valeo, A. (2015). The construct validation of emotional intelligence as a measure of implicit L2 grammatical knowledge: A validation study. *Journal of Second Language Acquisition*, 42(3), 567–589.
- Suzuki, Y., & DeKeyser, R. M. (2017). The interface of explicit and implicit knowledge in a second language: Insights from individual differences in cognitive aptitudes. *Language Learning*, 67, 747–790. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12241>
- Willis, J. (2015). *Teaching English through English*. Longman.

Biodata

Bahar Babaei holds an M.A degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from Islamic Azad University (IAU), Lahijan Branch. She has taught English for 15 years. Her current research interests are Dynamic Assessment, Learning Strategies, and Language Learning with Integrating Technology.

Iraj Montashery received his Ph.D. in English Literature from Putra Malaysia University. He is currently an assistant professor of English literature at the Islamic Azad University (IAU) in Lahijan, Iran.