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Research Article

The Effects of Implementing Dynamic Assessment on Iranian Students' Autonomy and Vocabulary Learning: A Sociocultural Perspective

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Abstract

The current study represents one of the first systematic and scientific attempt to explore the effects of dynamic assessment (DA) on learning factors in Iranian scholastic context. This research was conducted to examine the impact of DA on the autonomy and vocabulary growth of Iranian high school students. For this purpose, 60 male Iranian students from two public vocational high schools participated in this mixed-methods quasi-experimental research. In order to collect the necessary quantitative data, two tools were utilized: a questionnaire on student autonomy and a vocabulary assessment. For this study, participants were split into an experimental group and a control group. Prior to the academic term, the pretests, namely autonomy and vocabulary, were conducted. During the academic term, the experimental group underwent the sandwich format of dynamic assessment comprising three phases: pretest, mediation, and posttest. The control group underwent traditional teaching methods. Following the conclusion of the academic term, the posttests, namely autonomy and vocabulary, were conducted once more. The data collected from the pretest and posttests of this study were analyzed using independent samples t-test and its non-parametric equivalent. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was conducted at the conclusion of the instructional phase to gather their reactions regarding the practice of DA. The findings of the research showed that applying DA had a statistically significant impact on the autonomy and vocabulary growth of Iranian high school students. Moreover, the qualitative aspect of the research indicated that the participants viewed DA as a beneficial method for enhancing their autonomy and vocabulary acquisition. Of course, some of the interviewees also raised comments about the weaknesses of this method, including the ambiguity of the implementation process, the loss of the boundary between teaching and evaluation, the subsequent loss of value of grading, and reduced motivation for participation. The findings of this study have pedagogical applications for EFL learners in public schools, EFL teachers, and policy-makers in the field of English language education in public schools to improve the quality and effectiveness of English language teaching.

Keywords: autonomous learning, dynamic assessment, learner autonomy, vocabulary development

1. Introduction

In the past few years, experts in language education have focused on innovative assessment methods and their roles in education (Bachman & Adrian, 2022; Mohammadkhah et al., 2022). Educational methods have slowly

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shifted to prioritizing assessment as the central aspect of learning (Çimen, 2022; Kosimov & Latipov, 2022). Furthermore, recent language education specialists have notably concentrated on the sociocultural theory viewpoint (Lantolf et al., 2021). Currently, the influence of society in the language acquisition process is a widely recognized idea, and numerous language education frameworks depend on the acknowledgment of this learning theory (Silseth & Gilje, 2019).

Driven by social and cultural theories, methods of educational evaluation have shifted from conventional tactics, such as static assessment (SA), to formative assessment (FA), and now to dynamic assessment (DA) (Poehner & Wang, 2021). As an alternative evaluation method, DA informed by sociocultural theory aims to combine teaching and assessment to facilitate more effective learning (Alsaadi, 2021; Davin et al., 2017). This sought-after integration is achieved through a collaborative process known as mediation. The intervention provided by the facilitator (instructor) aims to ready students for achieving the next possible stages of knowledge and skills advancement (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018).

DA seeks the absent connection in the bond between evaluation and education. While SA views assessment and learning as distinct processes aimed at gauging the individual performance of the examiner, DA perceives these processes as unified, guiding examiners toward their maximum level of development (Sagre et al., 2022; Sanaeifar & Divcolaii, 2019). Rather than possessing a one-sided perspective on the end of learning, DA adopts a comprehensive view of the complete learning journey, constantly monitoring learners' continuous progress to refine their comprehension and knowledge (Brown, 2020; Grapin & Llosa, 2022).

Poehner and Lantolf (2023) stated that DA aims to integrate instruction and assessment to enhance students' learning effectiveness by offering neglected chances for interactions between students' peers and more knowledgeable individuals, typically their teachers. DA contests the notion of fixed evaluations intended to gauge students' potential learning outcomes by utilizing teachers' reflective feedback and intervention both during instruction and throughout the assessment process itself (Sun et al., 2023).

This combination of evaluation and training is facilitated through a mediative intervention during the assessment process, encouraging examiners to reassess learners' performance to support their advancement to greater levels of growth (Meng & Fu, 2023; Rassaei, 2023). DA emphasizes students' prospective growth rather than the results of past or present development, urging practitioners to deliver prompt and comprehensive mediational support to enhance students' learning performance, ensuring the attainment of the

subsequent proficiency level (Dixon et al., 2023). It enables them to gradually engage in autonomous learning with the support and guidance of their teacher (García, 2019).

To enhance both the established and potential levels of learners' understanding, DA depends on offering an engaging intervention that is attuned to the learners' reactions to mediation by fostering cognitive growth throughout the evaluation process in a reconstructive way, allowing them to advance beyond their current knowledge level (Tang & Ma, 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2023).

Vocabulary knowledge is very vital among students of English as a second language because it is considered the key to entering the world of learning and an important part of exam scores is also focused on having vocabulary knowledge. On the other hand, there is no appropriate and reliable approach at the school level for teaching vocabulary. Therefore, the researcher decided to organize the present study around this variable.

Knowledge of vocabulary stands as one of the most crucial and impactful elements in acquiring language abilities, encompassing both productive skills such as speaking and writing, as well as receptive skills like listening and reading (Issa et al., 2020; Sun & Yin, 2022). Lacking adequate vocabulary understanding is a key issue for learners in achieving a satisfactory level of language proficiency in English (Crossley et al., 2019). The goal of placing special focus on enhancing students' vocabulary knowledge is to enhance their cognitive and perceptual skills to encourage language interactions and meaning-sharing (Zhang et al., 2021).

For numerous language instructors, teaching vocabulary can be overwhelming since they must cover various components of lexicon knowledge, including meaning, form, and function, at the same time for students who need to link these elements to build a mental framework of the assigned vocabulary in their existing lexicon storage (Huang et al., 2019). The challenges in vocabulary acquisition stem from factors including the complexity of pronouncing certain words, inconsistencies between a word's spelling and its sound, varying frequencies of words, insufficient semantic and pragmatic understanding, and misinterpretation of meanings (Hao et al., 2021; Li & Hafner, 2022; Tiing et al., 2021; Zhu, 2021).

Since a large share of assessment scores in public schools for English language courses are based on vocabulary knowledge, and also due to the lack of self-reliance in the learning process among public school students and the lack of sufficient and coherent research in outlining new educational

approaches based on integrating teaching with assessment and ultimately better learning, the researcher decided to take steps to investigate the impact of dynamic assessment on the autonomy and development of vocabulary learning among public school students in Iran. In light of the previously mentioned issues, this research was conducted to examine the impact of dynamic assessment on the autonomy and vocabulary acquisition of Iranian students, viewed from a sociocultural perspective. Consequently, this study aimed to address the subsequent research questions:

RQ1: Does implementing dynamic assessment have any statistically significant effect on Iranian high school students' autonomy?
RQ2: Does implementing dynamic assessment have any statistically significant effect on Iranian high school students' English vocabulary learning?
RQ3: What are Iranian high school students' reactions to implementing dynamic assessment in the classroom?

2. Literature Review

DA is rooted in the idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) formulated by Vygotsky as part of the sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory describes the ZPD as the distance between what a student can do independently and what he/she can achieve with assistance from someone more knowledgeable (Infante & Poehner, 2019). Engaging with students' ZPD via dynamic interactive feedback enhances cognitive abilities and facilitates their progress to achieve the next level of performance (Ghaemi & Houshangi, 2021; Luković et al., 2022).

In the DA method, rather than watching, assessing, and grading individual performance during task completion, the instructor aims to assess and grade learners' performance while they benefit from interactions such as hints, guided questions, feedback, and different kinds of educational support. In this method, the teacher's mediational intervention is highly significant and crucial, with the primary aim being to elevate learners to their next potential learning stage (Kao & Kuo, 2023).

In this method, the emphasis of teaching is on engaging intervention and ongoing assistance for students throughout the learning journey. In this specific assessment approach, the emphasis is on the learners' interactive performance, and the progression of learning is based on dialogue negotiation between the teacher and the learners, as learners are not tasked with completing learning activities independently (Zhang & Xi, 2023).

Teachers' mediation varies from hints, prompts, and implicit-explicit responses based on students' proficiency levels and task challenges (Kao,

2022). Educators implementing DA are urged to guide students through varying proficiency levels by overseeing and adjusting their performance improvement trajectory, enabling them to gain control over their learning in the future (Orellana et al., 2019).

Furthermore, recent research has differentiated between two varieties of DA method. Interventionist and interactionist DA are two key categories utilized based on the learning environment and circumstances (Malmir, 2020; Ritonga et al., 2022; Sanaeifar & Divcolaii, 2019; Tang & Ma, 2023). In the interventionist approach, mediation is offered using pre-established and set prompts to the learner across various learning contexts, allowing the teacher to maintain a list of predetermined intervention strategies for each scenario (Poehner & Lantolf, 2023). Conversely, in the interactionist DA, the mediation involving the learners and the teacher relies on immediate and functional contexts, and the intervention is not pre-established but arises as situational cues. In this method, feedback corrections and teacher assistance are customized according to inclusive interactive responses, with greater focus on the specific needs of students (Poehner & Wang, 2021).

In the sandwich structure of DA, scaffolding mediation occurs once during the administration of pretest and posttests, while in the cake structure, mediation develops through hierarchical layers of support after each test item (Sanaeifar & Farsi, 2020). During the application of the DA approach, the educator must step in when the learner faces an issue and work to address and ease the problem through collaborative engagement (Poehner & Lantolf, 2023).

Learner autonomy refers to a student's ability to take responsibility for their own learning. Autonomous learners are believed to manage and monitor their learning, choose appropriate materials, use effective strategies, and evaluate and refine their learning processes (Little, 2022). Importantly, autonomy does not imply learning in isolation; instead, it involves independent learning situated within a social and cultural environment. In this view, an autonomous learner actively participates in communication and interaction with others, taking ownership of their learning while contributing responsibly to the community. Consequently, the capacity to maintain social interaction through mutual engagement for learners is a crucial and defining element of autonomous learning (Yildiz & Yucedal, 2020).

The independence of students does not diminish the crucial role of the teacher in the classroom; rather, by taking on an active role as a facilitator of learning, it enhances the teacher's identity and fosters better interpersonal relationships, thereby enriching effective participation in the classroom

(Khotimah et al., 2019). A self-directed learner can skillfully and deliberately apply successful learning techniques with guidance from their teacher, and with the teacher's support, he/she may participate in the decision-making process related to education (Ludwig & Tassinari, 2023).

By fostering students' sense of responsibility, autonomous learning strengthens their engagement, collaboration, perseverance, and confidence. Interaction with the teacher supports this development by guiding their learning while gradually reducing reliance on the instructor, enabling learners to explore their inner capacities more fully (Hui et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2022). A self-directed learner shows a strong level of independence and self-regulation, which includes setting goals, determining priorities, managing tasks, evaluating progress, and making improvements (Yang et al., 2024). These qualities encourage active participation in the learning process and allow teachers to offer more targeted and effective support (Hoo et al., 2025).

To cultivate learner autonomy, teachers should gradually and flexibly shift responsibility to the students. At first, responsibilities should be aligned with the learner's current abilities, avoiding an abrupt expansion of their decision-making role. This helps learners adapt to and internalize their new responsibilities, eventually enabling them to apply this autonomy effectively within the educational environment (Chong & Reinders, 2025).

Self-directed learning allows learners to guide their own educational paths according to their individual needs and interests. By reducing reliance on the teacher, it encourages students to take an active role in shaping both the learning process and the decisions that influence it. In doing so, they gain the ability to manage and oversee their learning effectively (Ly, 2024).

To communicate their thoughts, feelings, and comprehension successfully, students must develop an appropriate vocabulary repertoire (Iwaizumi & Webb, 2022). This includes recognizing the grammatical roles of specific words and understanding how vocabulary behaves across different spoken and written contexts (Legault et al., 2019). Vocabulary knowledge is typically viewed through two lenses: receptive and productive. Receptive knowledge refers to the ability to recognize and understand words during listening and reading, while productive knowledge involves using words correctly, pronouncing them accurately, and applying them appropriately in speaking and writing (Uchihara & Clenton, 2023).

Active vocabulary development is a key component of achieving proficiency in English. For learning to be effective, students must acquire vocabulary in ways that allow them to use new words across different contexts and grammatical patterns. Vocabulary growth should be an interactive and

dynamic process rather than a passive one (Chen & Yuan, 2025). In addition to active involvement, maintaining a steady routine of vocabulary learning is crucial. Learners who are motivated to discover and investigate new words independently benefit greatly from autonomous learning practices, which have been shown to support this process effectively (Teng, 2024).

Using suitable strategies is also vital for expanding vocabulary. Strategic approaches can significantly enhance the learning experience (Liu et al., 2024). Because autonomous learning naturally encourages strategic thinking, students who engage in it tend to strengthen their vocabulary skills—both by increasing the number of words they know and by applying those words in varied contexts (Luan et al., 2025).

Furthermore, situational learning within an autonomous framework offers learners greater flexibility and freedom in how they build vocabulary. By connecting vocabulary tasks with authentic situations and real-life learning experiences, this approach makes learning more enjoyable and meaningful. Such autonomy boosts learners' sense of accomplishment, increases their motivation, and provides broader opportunities for directing their own progress (Teng, 2025). Research consistently supports the positive relationship between autonomous learning and vocabulary development, indicating that learners who adopt this approach generally achieve stronger vocabulary growth and more efficient learning outcomes (Tai, 2024).

3. Method

3.1. Design

A mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was employed to answer the research questions of this study. Since it was impossible for the researchers to select a random sample for this study; therefore, nonrandom convenience sampling of intact groups was used; as a result, the study employed a quasi-experimental design. This study utilized the quasi-experimental method with a pretest/treatment/posttest non-equivalent design. The quantitative phase was followed by a semi-structured interview created to gather students' reactions to the introduction of DA in the classroom.

3.2. Participants

The researchers employed convenience sampling technique, selecting participants who were readily accessible and met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Since the researchers aimed to examine students within a public-school setting, the only viable option was to utilize their own classrooms at the public high school where one of the researchers works as an English teacher.

The study involved 60 Iranian male tenth-grade students at Tolouei and Abbaspour vocational high schools in Sowme'eh Sara, Guilan. They were assigned to two groups of 30 as the experimental and control groups. All participants were native Persian speakers of Iranian origin. They were informed about the confidentiality of their data and participated voluntarily. Each of the students had studied English as a subject for three years during their secondary school education.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Student's Autonomy Questionnaire

The Zhang and Li (2004) questionnaire was employed to assess students' autonomy levels. The instrument comprises 32 Likert-scale items distributed across five domains: evaluating English teachers' goals and expectations, establishing learning objectives and plans, applying learning strategies, monitoring strategy use, and reflecting on the overall English learning process. Given its alignment with the constructs targeted in this study, the questionnaire was selected as the primary measurement tool. It was administered as both a pretest and posttest, conducted before and after the instructional intervention. Prior to the main study, the researcher piloted the instrument and calculated its internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.80$).

3.3.2. Vocabulary Test

A researcher-constructed vocabulary test derived from the 10th-grade *Vision 1* textbook (Alavi Moghaddam et al., 2016) was used to assess learners' vocabulary knowledge. The book is easily accessible to both teachers and students, ensuring consistent exposure and reducing logistical difficulties. The test consisted of 30 multiple-choice items targeting the vocabulary covered during the treatment phase. It was administered as both a pretest and posttest, mirroring the procedure used for the autonomy questionnaire. To confirm reliability, the researcher piloted the test and calculated its internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, obtaining a coefficient of approximately 0.83.

3.3.3. Semi-Structured Interview

A semi-structured interview created by one of the researchers was used to gather students' reactions to the introduction of DA in the classroom. Expert reviewers confirmed that the questions adequately represented the constructs being examined. This interview consisted of 8 questions designed to gather the interviewees' reactions regarding DA's impact on their autonomy, vocabulary acquisition, future expectations, acceptance or rejection, benefits, and drawbacks. To assess the content validity of the interview items, three TEFL

specialists were asked to provide their feedback on them. Following the expert panel's evaluation, the interview items were systematically revised to enhance clarity and content validity. The interview was administered by the researcher in a face-to-face format and had a duration of approximately 20 minutes.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Participants were assigned to two equal groups: an experimental group (n = 30) and a control group (n = 30). Prior to the start of the academic term, all participants completed two pretest measures—an autonomy questionnaire and a vocabulary test. Throughout the term, the experimental group received instruction using the sandwich-format dynamic assessment (DA) procedure, which consists of three sequential phases: pretest, mediation, and posttest. In the pretest phase, learners completed initial tasks to establish baseline performance. During the mediation phase, the teacher, functioning as a mediator, provided targeted support addressing specific difficulties identified in the pretest. In the final posttest phase, learners completed parallel tasks designed to measure progress and evaluate learning outcomes. The hallmark of the sandwich format is its structure; wherein instructional intervention occurs in a concentrated period between the pretest and posttest stages. Progress was assessed by comparing posttest results to pretest outcomes to evaluate the impact of mediation on learner development. For the qualitative research inquiry of this study, participants were asked to respond to 8 semi-structured questions during a 20-minute interview session, and their responses were fully transcribed. The qualitative data acquired were classified and encoded according to certain specific observed themes, after which the frequency of each theme was documented and taken into account for descriptive analysis.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data collected from the pretest and posttests were analyzed using SPSS software version 26. The Mann–Whitney U test and the Independent Samples t-test were run based on the nature of the variables and the normality of the data. Content analysis was employed by the researcher to systematically analyze the qualitative data. The process began with repeated readings of the dataset to achieve familiarity and identify initial patterns. The researcher then developed a coding scheme based on the study's research questions and the recurring concepts observed in the data. Each segment of text was coded accordingly, with codes subsequently organized into broader categories representing key themes. Throughout the analysis, the researcher refined the coding scheme to maintain consistency and ensure alignment with emerging

insights. Coded data were reviewed multiple times to verify accuracy and enhance the credibility of the findings.

4. Results

4.1. Results for the First Research Question

To answer the first research question of this study (i.e., Does implementing dynamic assessment have any statistically significant effect on Iranian high school students' autonomy?), descriptive statistics for the control and experimental groups' autonomy pretests' scores were run as presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The Descriptive Statistics for Autonomy Pretest Scores

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Variance
Control Group	30	80	34	114	67.40	22.62	511.97
Experimental Group	30	81	39	120	77.77	23.26	541.01

Table 1 displays the pretest score averages for the control and experimental groups, which are 67.40 and 77.77, respectively. While the experimental group's mean is notably higher than that of the control group (77.77 > 67.40), further analysis is needed to determine whether this difference is statistically significant. To address this, the researchers first assessed the normality of the datasets to ensure that the appropriate statistical tests could be applied. The Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized for this purpose, and the resulting normality statistics for the pretest scores are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2
The Normality Statistics for the Autonomy Pretest Scores

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Autonomy (Pretest)	.960	60	.046

Table 2 reveals that the significance value (sig) for the pretest scores is 0.046, which is below the critical threshold of 0.05 (0.046 < 0.05). This result indicates that the pretest scores are not normally distributed. Consequently, parametric tests are not appropriate for comparing the group means. Instead, a non-parametric test should be employed to account for the non-normal nature of the data. Given that the comparison involves two independent groups, the Mann-Whitney U test is the suitable choice, as it serves as the non-parametric counterpart to the Independent Samples t-test. Table 3 provides the inferential statistics for the autonomy pretest scores, offering insight into the analysis.

Table 3
The Results of Mann-Whitney U test for the Autonomy Pretest Scores

	Autonomy Pretest
Mann-Whitney U	335.00
Wilcoxon W	800.00
Z	-1.70
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.08

Table 3 reports a significance value of 0.08, which is above the conventional threshold of 0.05 (0.08 > 0.05). This indicates that the difference between the mean pretest scores of the two groups is not statistically significant. To further address the first research question, Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the autonomy posttest scores of both the control and experimental groups.

Table 4
The Descriptive Statistics for Autonomy Posttest Scores

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Variance
Control Group	30	75	37	112	67.00	21.912	480.138
Experimental Group	30	76	49	125	85.40	22.132	489.834

Table 4 presents the posttest mean scores for the control and experimental groups, which are 67.00 and 85.40, respectively. This shows that the experimental group achieved a substantially higher mean score than the control group (85.40 > 67.00). Nevertheless, determining whether this difference is statistically significant requires further analysis. As a preliminary step, the researchers examined the normality of the posttest data. The Shapiro–Wilk test was conducted to assess whether the scores were normally distributed. The resulting normality statistics are displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5
The Normality Statistics for the Autonomy Posttest Scores

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Autonomy (Posttest)	.96	60	.09

Table 5 shows that the significance value of the posttest scores is 0.09, which is greater than the critical value of 0.05 (0.09 > 0.05). This indicates that the scores are normally distributed. Given this result, the researchers proceeded with a parametric test to analyze the inferential statistics for comparing the means. Because the two sets of scores came from independent groups, an Independent Samples t-test was used for the comparison. Before conducting the inferential analysis, it was necessary to assess the homogeneity of variances using Levene's test. This step determines which row of the significance values

should be consulted when evaluating the null hypothesis. Table 6presents the results of Levene's test.

Table 6
Levene Test's Statistics for the Autonomy Posttest's Scores

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.040	1	58	.84

According to Table 6, Levene's test produced a significance (sig) value of 0.842, which is higher than the 0.05 threshold (0.84 > 0.05). This result suggests that the variance difference between the two score sets is not statistically meaningful. In other words, the assumption of equal variances is met. Consequently, the significance value in the first row of the inferential statistics table should be used when interpreting the findings. Table 7 summarizes the inferential statistics for the autonomy posttest results.

Table 7
The Results of Independent Samples T-test for the Autonomy Posttest Scores

	t-test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig.	MD	SED	95% CI of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	-3.23	58	.002	-18.40	5.68	-29.78	-7.01
Equal variances not assumed	-3.23	57.99	.002	-18.40	5.68	-29.78	-7.01

Table 7 shows a significance value of 0.002, which falls well below the 0.05 cutoff (0.002 < 0.05). This result indicates a statistically significant difference between the two posttest mean scores. As a result, the researchers are justified in rejecting the study's first null hypothesis. Overall, the findings imply that applying DA had a meaningful and statistically significant effect on enhancing autonomy among Iranian high school students.

4.2. Analysis of the Second Research Question

To answer the second research question of this study (i.e., Does implementing dynamic assessment have any statistically significant effect on Iranian high school students' English vocabulary learning?), descriptive statistics for the control and experimental groups' vocabulary pretests' scores were conducted (Table 8).

Table 8
The Descriptive Statistics for Vocabulary Pretest Scores

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Variance
Control Group	30	17	8	25	14.13	4.61	21.29
Experimental Group	30	15	6	21	13.90	3.82	14.64

Table 8 presents the pretest mean scores for the control and experimental groups, recorded as 13.90 and 14.13, respectively. While the experimental group's mean is slightly lower than that of the control group (13.90 < 14.13), it is important to assess whether this difference is statistically meaningful. To address this, the normality of the datasets was first assessed. The researchers conducted a Shapiro-Wilk test to examine the normality of the pretest scores (Table 9).

Table 9
The Normality Statistics for the Vocabulary Pretest Scores

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Vocabulary (Pretest)	.97	60	.24

Table 9 reports a significance value (sig) of 0.24 for the pretest scores, which is higher than the 0.05 threshold (0.24 > 0.05). This result suggests that the data follow a normal distribution. Consequently, the researchers opted for a parametric test to compare group means. Given that the two sets of scores belong to different groups, the Independent Samples T-test was conducted to facilitate this comparison. Prior to presenting inferential statistics, the homogeneity of variances was assessed via the Levene test (Table 10).

Table 10
Levene Test's Statistics for the Vocabulary Pretest Scores

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.75	1	58	.39

Table 10 shows a Levene's test significance value of 0.39, which is greater than the 0.05 cutoff (0.39 > 0.05). This result indicates that the variance difference between the two score sets is not statistically significant, meaning the variances can be treated as equal. Thus, the assumption of equal variances is satisfied. Nevertheless, the significance value found in the first row of the inferential statistics table is suitable for interpreting the results. Table 11 provides the inferential statistics for the vocabulary pretest scores.

Table 11
The Results of Independent Samples T-test for the Vocabulary Pretest Scores

	t-test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig.	MD	SED	95% CI of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.21	58	.83	.23	1.09	-1.95	2.42
Equal variances not assumed	.21	56.08	.83	.23	1.09	-1.95	2.42

Table 11 reports a significance value of 0.83, which is above the 0.05 threshold (0.83 > 0.05). This result shows that the difference between the two pretest mean scores is not statistically significant. Proceeding to the second research question, the analysis continues with a presentation of the descriptive statistics for the reading comprehension posttest scores of both the control and experimental groups, summarized in Table 12.

Table 12
The Descriptive Statistics for Vocabulary Posttest Scores

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Variance
Control Group	30	14	9	23	14.20	3.98	15.89
Experimental Group	30	16	10	26	17.67	4.13	17.12

Table 12 reports the posttest mean scores for the control and experimental groups as 17.67 and 14.20, respectively. The experimental group shows a higher average than the control group (17.67 > 14.20). Nonetheless, additional analysis is needed to determine whether this difference is statistically significant. As an initial step, the researchers examined the normality of the data. To assess the distribution of the posttest scores, a Shapiro–Wilk test was performed (Table 13).

Table 13
The Normality Statistics for the Vocabulary Posttest's Scores

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Vocabulary (Posttest)	.953	60	.02

Table 13 indicates that the significance value (sig) for the posttest scores is 0.021, which is below the 0.05 threshold (0.02 < 0.05). This result shows that the data are not normally distributed. Consequently, parametric tests are not appropriate for comparing the means in this analysis. Instead, because the scores come from two independent groups, the researchers adopted a non-parametric alternative to the Independent Samples T-test. The Mann–Whitney U test is the suitable option for this purpose, as it allows for comparing the groups' mean scores. Table 14 presents the inferential statistics based on the vocabulary posttest results.

Table 14
The Results of Mann–Whitney U Test for the Vocabulary Posttest Scores

	Vocabulary Pretest
Mann-Whitney U	237.50
Wilcoxon W	702.50
Z	-3.15
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.002

As shown in Table 14, the significance value ($p = 0.002$) is below the 0.05 cutoff ($p < 0.05$). This result demonstrates that the difference between the two posttest mean scores is statistically significant. Therefore, the researchers have sufficient grounds to reject the study's second null hypothesis. These results suggest that the implementation of DA had a statistically significant impact on the English vocabulary acquisition of Iranian high school students.

4.3. Analysis of the Third Research Question

To address the third research question of this study (i.e., What are Iranian high school students' reactions to implementing dynamic assessment in the classroom?), the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the experimental group, who participated in DA practice throughout the term. To achieve this, their responses were recorded and sorted into distinct categories. The responses were categorized by first reading all answers carefully, developing codes based on recurring ideas and research questions, and assigning each response to the appropriate code. These codes were then grouped into broader themes, reviewed for accuracy, and refined. Another researcher checked the coding to ensure reliability, resulting in clear and well-supported categories. Subsequently, the occurrence and proportion of each response were noted.

Table 15
Result of the Qualitative Research Analysis

Code	Answer category	Frequency	Percentage
1	*To what extent do you think this teaching method has been successful for your academic progress?*		
	The positive impact of this approach on improving my academic performance exceeded my expectations.	14	46%
	This method was notably beneficial for my academic growth.	9	30%
	Through this method, my academic successes progressed in a satisfactory manner.	5	16%
	This method has not made a considerable difference in my educational advancement.	2	8%
2	*Do you like the procedure and process of this form of teaching?*		
	Yes, definitely.	25	83%
	No, not at all.	2	6%
	I have no idea.	3	11%
3	*What issues and problems did you face during the period you experienced this teaching method?*		
	I was unable to grasp the reasoning behind this method.	10	33%

Code	Answer category	Frequency	Percentage
	The absence of acknowledgment of the exam circumstances was challenging for me.	8	26%
	I sensed that there was little distinction between powerful and weaker students.	5	16%
	I did not grasp the concepts thoroughly since I passed the exam with the teacher's guidance and support.	7	23%
4	*What aspect of this teaching method attracted your attention the most?*		
	Being free from concerns about exams and assignments.	9	30%
	The teacher's assistance and direction during the learning process.	11	36%
	The welcoming and bold classroom atmosphere.	6	20%
	Having the opportunity to make my own educational choices.	4	14%
5	*Has this teaching method helped you do homework independently?*		
	This approach greatly assisted my self-directed learning.	7	23%
	I achieved significant success in advancing my independent learning.	9	30%
	This method enhanced my sense of responsibility for learning.	8	27%
	This method improved my ability to handle learning challenges independently.	6	20%
6	*Has this teaching method helped you learn vocabulary better than before?*		
	I made remarkable progress in vocabulary learning.	12	41%
	I am more successful in learning vocabulary than before.	7	23%
	The depth and breadth of my vocabulary increased significantly.	8	26%
	I did not notice a significant change in vocabulary growth.	3	10%
7	*Do you want to continue this teaching method for the rest of the semester?*		
	Yes, it improved my learning performance.	9	32%
	Yes, it created a friendlier classroom atmosphere.	8	26%
	Yes, it reduced stress and anxiety in learning.	7	23%
	Yes, it allows learning at my own pace.	4	13%
	No, it seems vague and unfamiliar.	2	6%
8	*To what extent do you accept this teaching method and its grading process?*		
	I like the grading process because my performance improved.	8	26%
	It provides an acceptable level of learning satisfaction.	10	34%
	It promotes educational justice, so I accept it.	11	36%
	Grading loses its real meaning and is not acceptable.	1	4%

As shown in Table 15, in response to the first question (i.e., To what extent do you think this teaching method has been successful for your academic progress?), 92% of the interviewees found this approach as a constructive practice for their learning development. Here is one of the comments about this question.

> With the help of this method, I have gained a better sense of learning and my learning performance has increased significantly compared to before. Now I have renewed hope for success in learning and I have a greater desire to strive for success.

This comment showed that this approach was regarded as an effective tool for developing learning performance and brings more enthusiasm to learn for the students.

Concerning the second question (i.e., Do you like the procedure and process of this form of teaching?), 83% of the respondents appreciated the process and procedure of this method and considered it a suitable practice for their learning. This is a comment submitted in reply to this question.

> I find the process and method of this approach to be pleasing and appropriate because, by moving away from the conventional grading systems that were straightforward and inflexible, there is considerable support from the teacher in this technique, which provides me with a sense of reassurance regarding the exam and the grade. Due to these factors, I appreciate this approach.

This remark indicated that for students, this method is seen as a supportive and stress-free activity that stimulates their curiosity and provides them with confidence regarding the grading system.

In relation to the third question (i.e., What issues and problems did you face with during the period you experienced this teaching method?), the interviewees identified several hindrances for this method, such as the reasoning underlying the approach and the vagueness of its essence, the lack of a conventional competitive environment, and the need for teacher facilitation. This is a sample comment addressing the question.

> Since I have been trained over the years with traditional methods of learning, especially in the field of testing and learning, working with this method seems unfamiliar and somewhat strange and illogical to me. It is important to me that the grading process clearly identifies differences in students' knowledge levels.

This comment suggests that the interviewee's familiarity with traditional teaching methods resulted in a psychological connection to the competitive grading process, which is not present in the DA process, leading to an unclear understanding of the DA grading process.

About the fourth question (i.e., What aspect of this teaching method has attracted your attention the most?), the respondents highlighted the presence of teacher guidance, a welcoming atmosphere, independency, and a supportive environment as notable advantages of this method. The following is one of the comments to this question.

> In this way, I no longer worry about exam scores because with the guidance and supportive presence of the teacher, I pass the exam much more easily, and it has become easier for me to tolerate the classroom and I have gained a more positive feeling about the learning process.

In this comment, the interviewee highlighted the prominent benefits of the DA approach, which has shown to enhance the classroom friendly environment, providing students with greater autonomy and control over decisions and a sense of security regarding assessments.

Considering the fifth question (i.e., Do you think this teaching method has helped you to be able to do your homework without the help of the teacher and others?), interestingly, all the interviewees found this approach as an effective tool to develop their autonomy. The following narrative is an instance comment to this question.

> In the presence of this approach, I have more attention to the lesson and with the help of the teacher I can experience more decision-making power and freedom of action. In addition, I feel more positive and have less anxiety and tension than before. This approach puts me on the path to self-reliant learning.

In this remark, the interviewee stated that DA encourages him to take on greater responsibility in his learning journey and diminishes his anxiety, which are both noted as benefits of DA in learning.

Concerning the sixth question (i.e., Has this teaching method helped you to learn vocabulary better than before?), 90% of respondents viewed DA as a significant factor that greatly enhances their vocabulary learning performance. Here is one of the comments to this question.

> In terms of vocabulary acquisition advancements, this method has made me significantly more proficient than prior, allowing me to

> encounter fewer obstacles in the learning journey, and naturally, my skill in handling unexpected difficulties has grown.

It's clearly stated in this comment that DA brings the opportunity to involve in learning process independently for students and puts them in a track to learn more autonomously giving them the bravery to challenge their capabilities in learning process to reach their stronger version as a language learner.

Regarding the seventh question (i.e., Do you want to continue this teaching method to the rest of your academic semester?), 94% of respondents expressed a preference for continuing DA in their next semester, citing benefits compared to the prior teaching method, such as a stress-free classroom environment, supportive teacher assistance, and more amicable classroom interactions. Here is a comment in response this question.

> Practicing this method was a positive experience for me. It fostered a more welcoming environment in the classroom, enhanced interaction with the teacher, and crucially, lowered my anxiety before the exam. Currently, I feel more positive about attending class and have increased enthusiasm for engaging in class activities.

This comment illustrates that DA practice influences students' engagement levels and fosters greater enthusiasm for learning in a supportive environment, making interactions more effective and conducive to improved learning outcomes. Concerning the final question (i.e., To what extent do you accept this teaching method and its subsequent grading process?), 96% of participants view DA as a positive method for their educational growth. Reasons they cited for accepting DA included learning satisfaction, grading security, equality, and an interactive classroom atmosphere. The following excerpt is a reply to this question.

> Having undergone this approach, I am now more content in the classroom and feel more confident due to increased interaction with the teacher and enhanced self-assurance in completing assignments. I am even more eager to take part in classroom activities. Thus, I consider this strategy to be a useful way to enhance learning performance.

Based on this remark, interviewees view this method as effective due to factors like increased satisfaction, better interaction, enhanced security, and greater excitement, all of which have also been noted as advantages of DA in recent studies.

5. Discussion

The quantitative data analysis in this study highlighted two key findings. First, the implementation of DA had a statistically significant impact on Iranian high school students' autonomy. Specifically, exposure to DA practices effectively boosted their levels of independence and self-regulation in learning. Second, DA implementation also had a statistically significant effect on students' English reading skills, particularly enhancing their vocabulary acquisition.

Focusing on the first finding, the high degree of interaction between the teacher and students creates a supportive and constructive classroom environment that encourages students to unlock their potential, fosters active engagement, and motivates them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. As highlighted earlier, the interactive and dialogic features of DA are inherently connected to the development of learner autonomy. Chong and Reinders (2025) pointed out that fostering an autonomous learning environment involves shifting the teacher's role from that of a knowledge provider to a facilitator who supports learners in directing their own learning. Effective collaboration between teachers and students is therefore crucial in promoting autonomy. By design, dynamic assessment fosters this collaboration, as it relies on dialogic interaction between learners and assessors (teachers, mediators, or peers) to help shape and extend learners' abilities (Yang et al., 2024).

This result is consistent with the findings of Infante and Poehner (2019), who showed that DA emphasizes active learner participation rather than relying on traditional, lecture-driven instruction. By creating an interactive classroom environment in which students collaborate, engage in purposeful dialogue, and connect their learning to real-world experiences, DA supports deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and improved knowledge retention. In the present study, DA similarly fostered higher levels of engagement, enhanced students' ability to remember information, and promoted the development of critical thinking skills. By involving learners directly in the learning process, interactive instructional approaches help cultivate a more dynamic and effective educational setting.

For learners to develop autonomy, they need to participate in a unique process of forming their own understanding of how learning takes place. This requires beginning with topics that inspire students to actively seek meaning. Success in learning hinges on empowering individuals to develop personalized interpretations and insights (Ly, 2024). The fundamental principle of DA lies in its emphasis on enabling students to create meaning tailored to their unique

learning paths. The DA process involves a teacher who plays an active role by interacting with, guiding, and providing targeted interventions to help shape students' comprehension and performance. When implemented effectively, DA has the potential to significantly foster students' autonomy in learning (Chen et al., 2025).

The second finding of the study highlights that vocabulary learning is an ongoing and dynamic process for students, requiring consistent effort in acquisition. It is unrealistic for language teachers to provide vocabulary instruction throughout every stage of a learner's development, from beginner to advanced levels. Therefore, students need to adopt independent learning strategies to continue progressing. The DA approach supports this growth by helping learners build self-confidence and rely more on their own skills rather than turning to dictionaries for word meanings (Kargar Behbahani et al., 2024). Moreover, DA cultivates a sense of individuality in the classroom, enabling students to recognize their personal identity and strengthening their self-worth throughout the learning experience (Ahmadnejad & Aghajanzadeh Kiasi, 2024).

Likewise, Izzati et al. (2024) contended that when the learning process is prioritized over the final outcome, DA provides learners with valuable opportunities to engage in tasks, participate more actively in class, and support their cognitive growth. By drawing on the interactive and collaborative dimensions of DA within a learner's ZPD, educators can design more effective learning environments that boost motivation, build self-confidence, and promote academic advancement (Dixon et al., 2023). The interactive qualities of DA may also shed light on the study's second finding, which underscores the importance of social interaction. Through DA, students take part in shared learning experiences where they exchange ideas, collaborate to solve problems, and expand their understanding collectively. Kao and Kuo (2023) further emphasized that DA fosters active participation, critical thinking, and the development of essential teamwork and communication skills.

The teacher's mediation plays a crucial role in helping students develop their self-concept while unlocking their higher cognitive potential for learning vocabulary (Sanaeifar et al., 2024). Through this form of mediation, the transfer of vocabulary from short-term to long-term memory is stimulated, representing a core component of DA practices (Rezai et al., 2024). The DA approach shows strong potential for strengthening students' cognitive skills, especially in areas such as critical thinking and problem-solving. It provides learners with strategies to think more analytically and to tackle learning difficulties with greater effectiveness. Consequently, it is reasonable to

conclude that DA practices can effectively bolster students' cognitive preparedness for mastering vocabulary (Izzati et al., 2024).

Based on the qualitative inquiry of this research, it was discovered that the interviewees from the experimental group who underwent the DA approach feel that it has a positive and impactful effect on enhancing performance, alleviating anxiety, boosting self-confidence, fostering autonomy, improving vocabulary acquisition, increasing feelings of security, enhancing the efficacy of classroom interactions, promoting enthusiasm for participation, and establishing a supportive classroom environment. The findings of recent studies can also reflect these interview results (Kao & Kuo, 2023; Luković et al., 2022; Zhang & Xi, 2023).

The respondents identified benefits and difficulties related to this method, such as the availability of interactive support from the instructor, reduced anxiety about assessments, enhanced influence and authority in making decisions, and heightened satisfaction and excitement for attending classes as key benefits of this approach. They noted the uncertainty in the grading philosophy, the absence of traditional competition opportunities, and the indistinct lines between testing and teaching as obstacles of this method. The qualitative results of this study indicate that the interviewees perceive this method as having a positive and meaningful impact on both their autonomy and vocabulary development, which is consistent with the quantitative findings. In this way, the qualitative data support the statistical results and offer parallel insights.

6. Conclusions

DA is a method of evaluation that emphasizes a learner's capacity to grow and adapt, rather than merely assessing their existing knowledge or skills (Grapin & Llosa, 2022). Using a test–teach–retest framework, this approach involves the examiner offering focused guidance and instruction (mediation) to help learners strengthen their performance on a given task. After this support is provided, the learner’s improvement and responsiveness are closely monitored (Liang & Sang, 2023). This method not only reveals what the learner can currently do but also sheds light on their learning potential and the degree of support needed to facilitate meaningful development (Sanaeifar et al., 2024).

Unlike traditional assessments that simply measure what learners already know, DA adopts an interactive approach by engaging students in mediated learning experiences. Its central aim is to observe how learners respond to instructional support and identify the type and amount of guidance

they need to improve, providing educators with valuable insights for adjusting their teaching practices (Kao, 2022). DA offers numerous advantages, including a clearer understanding of each learner's potential, opportunities for individualized instruction and intervention, and enhanced collaboration between teachers and parents (Jia et al., 2023). By focusing on the learning process with guided support, DA is particularly effective in diagnosing learning challenges and tailoring interventions to meet diverse learner needs (Luković et al., 2022).

DA and autonomous learning complement one another in ways that can significantly enrich the educational experience, particularly in language learning contexts. Dynamic assessment concentrates on evaluating a learner's capacity to develop through interaction and targeted support, whereas autonomous learning empowers students to take responsibility for their own progress. When combined, these approaches help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses, develop personalized strategies for growth, and ultimately become more independent and successful learners.

DA of vocabulary learning is an approach aimed at evaluating a learner's ability to acquire new vocabulary, placing emphasis on their potential for future development rather than solely measuring what they already know. Unlike conventional static evaluations, DA employs an interactive framework in which learners are initially assessed, provided with guided instruction or mediated learning, and subsequently reassessed to determine the progress they have made (Lantolf et al., 2021). This approach is especially valuable for uncovering a learner's potential and customizing instructional strategies, making it particularly effective for English language learners and students from diverse backgrounds struggling with vocabulary acquisition (Sun et al., 2023).

This study faced limitations regarding the sample size and sampling procedure due to financial constraints and difficulties in acquiring the necessary permits for conducting a comparative analysis among various schools in the country. Conversely, this research was delimited to absence of multi-contextual analysis, specifically, a comparative study of EFL vs ESL contexts, which might have yielded richer and more applicable insights that could serve as recommendations for future researchers in this area.

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