Research Article

A Comparative Analysis of the Perceived Effects of Interactionist and Interventionist Dynamic Assessment Models in the Improvement of Speaking Subskills Among Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

Dynamic assessment (DA) offers a holistic approach to evaluation by embedding assessment within instruction. Despite evidence suggesting the effectiveness of DA in language classrooms, there remains a reluctance among teachers to adopt DA practices. This reluctance stems from a lack of understanding of how DA models impact specific learning outcomes, particularly in speaking skills. One main contributing factor is the dominance of quantitative DA studies, which do not contextualize the differences between DA models. With a grounded theory design, this study explored the differences between Iranian EFL learners' perceived effects of interactionist and interventionist DA models on speaking accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Thirty undergraduate intermediate EFL learners from Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, were recruited through convenience sampling. Each participant had received ten hours of speaking lessons with one of the DA models embedded before participating in a semi-structured interview. The analysis of the participants' perceptions and reflections revealed that both DA models were well-received for improving speaking skills but had different perceived versatility on subskills. Learners perceived the interactionist model as an effective teaching method that improved their speaking accuracy and complexity but reduced fluency, while the interventionist model favored fluency at the expense of grammatical accuracy and complexity.

Keywords: interactionist DA, interventionist DA, speaking subskills, qualitative, EFL

Introduction

Assessment plays a crucial role in second language education by providing valuable information about students' learning progress, strengths, and areas for improvement. It helps educators and other stakeholders, such as syllabus designers, to understand the effectiveness of their teaching methods and curriculum. In addition, without carefully evaluating learners' performance, teachers might be unable to make informed decisions to support students' learning. However, in practice, assessments influence teachers' methodology in many ways, and not all are positive. Cheng (2003) argues that when teaching becomes test-oriented, students' scores do not reflect their competencies but the extent to which test training has been successful.

One of the attempts to address the mentioned problem was the introduction of the notion of assessment for learning, also known as Formative Assessment (FA) (Black & William, 2009). This assessment approach focuses on ongoing, real-time evaluation of students' progress and understanding during the learning process. It aims to inform instruction and support student learning by providing timely feedback, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and adjusting teaching strategies accordingly. While assessment for learning is a significantly positive step forward compared to summative tests, Poehener (2008) argues that it has not successfully eliminated the test effects, and there is a necessity for seamless integration and alignment of instruction and assessment. However, critiques have pointed out a notable discrepancy in meeting this expectation. Poehner and Lantolf (2005) note that, in many instances, assessment and instruction remain disjointed within FA practices. That is, the very existence of such tests might prompt teachers to teach to the tests and neglect authentic teachable moments (Bennett, 2011). Therefore, alternative assessment forms have been proposed and promoted.

A prominent alternative assessment method is known as Dynamic Assessment (DA) which has its roots in Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory (SCT). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) note that based on SCT, addressing learners' needs requires the consideration of social interactions and cultural factors in the learning process. According to Xi and Lantolf (2021), the ideal environment for learning within the SCT framework is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which can be seen as a metaphorical gap and the foundation for DA. The ZPD represents the difference between what a student can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with the help of a mediator, who could be their peers or an educator. Considering this foundation, DA emphasizes the integration of assessment and instruction into a single, unified process (Pohener & Yu, 2021). This approach challenges

traditional, static assessment forms by promoting ongoing, interactive evaluation that adapts to the learner's developmental needs. Through collaborative dialogues and mediated learning experiences, DA seeks to uncover the learner's potential by providing targeted assistance, such as hints and prompts, during the assessment (Rezaei et al., 2022). This method contrasts sharply with conventional assessments, where external support is minimized to measure abilities in isolation (Azizi & Khafaga, 2023). By aligning assessment with the learning process, DA aims to capture the learner's evolving capabilities more accurately and promote deeper understanding and skill development.

In practice, DA comes in two main models: interventionist and interactionist. While both models merge teaching and assessing, they differ in how mediations are provided. Lantolf and Poehner (2007) note that interventionist DA includes a step-wised mediation guideline for the examiner, helping them estimate the necessary effort and time to achieve a specific goal. In this model, instruction involves providing mediation that progresses from the most implicit to the most explicit to guide learners toward accurate responses; if students struggle to complete a task, the instructor offers the necessary prompts. However, interactionist DA explores the learning process, with the assessor actively engaging with the learner during the task, offering immediate and contingent mediation based on the learner's needs. The primary goal of the interactionist DA approach is to improve learners' skills without considering factors like the amount of effort or time involved. Additionally, this model does not establish a specific endpoint for achievement.

DA literature demonstrates extensive study results suggesting the superiority of implementing DA in EFL speaking classes compared to non-DA practices (Fani & Rashtchi, 2015; Khodabakhs et al., 2018; Safdari et al., 2020). However, according to Haywood and Lidz (2007), there is still a reluctance among practicing teachers to incorporate DA models in their lessons. Lantolf and Poehener (2011) claim that such reluctance is because teachers do not have a clear picture of how DA impacts provide better learning opportunities and more training and support to realize how to implement DA. Considering the importance of efficient speaking lessons in EFL contexts (Rashtchi & Khoshnevisan, 2008), providing teachers with more in-depth differences between the two DA models can help them maximize speaking improvement opportunities for their learners. Nonetheless, the existing DA literature does not showcase the DA models' mechanisms in speaking progress, especially regarding subskills such as accuracy, fluency, and complexity (Sarabi Asl et al., 2024).

Such a gap in the DA literature stems from the prevalence of quantitative studies that do not contextualize why certain DA models are better for a specific subskill. As a result, conducting qualitative research is justifiable due to the depth and richness of insights it can provide. Unlike quantitative approaches, qualitative research allows a nuanced understanding of students' individual experiences, thoughts, and feelings regarding DA. Interviews are an appropriate investigation tool in DA studies among all qualitative research methods. The method enables the collection of detailed narratives, which can reveal the complexities of how students perceive and respond to different assessment models, including the challenges they face and the benefits they experience. This qualitative perspective also aligns with DA's sociocultural foundation, which emphasizes the personal and context-dependent aspect of learning.

Therefore, the insights gained from students' perceptions regarding their speaking skills progress can shed some light on detailed differences between the DA models and help interested researchers to form hypotheses and conduct studies to address the reluctance among teachers to incorporate appropriate DA models in their speaking lessons. The present study explored the differences between the DA models on speaking subskills based on students' perceptions and reflections. To this end, the following research question was formed:

RQ: What are the Iranian EFL learners' perceived differences between the role of interventionist and interactionist Dynamic Assessment (DA) mechanisms in improving speaking accuracy, fluency, and complexity?

DA is an interactive approach to evaluating a learner's performance and potential. Rooted in the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, DA integrates assessment and instruction, moving beyond mere measurement to actively support learner development. It centers around the Zone of Proximal Development concept, focusing on what learners can achieve with guidance rather than what they can do independently. DA allows for a more holistic understanding of learners' abilities by considering their learning process and the support they require to reach their full potential. As Lidz and Gindis (2003) highlighted, DA depends on the examiner's interactions with the child (as a learner) to assess their potential and support their learning through guided learning experiences. Such assessment procedure emphasizes the collaborative nature of DA, where the assessor actively guides and scaffolds the learner's progress.

Furthermore, DA is not limited to evaluating a learner's current abilities but also considers their capacity for growth and learning potential. As Poehner and Lantolf (2005) point out, "dynamic assessment seeks to identify

and mediate the zone of closest development—the closest point to readiness for new learning that can be achieved with guidance" (p. 128). This perspective emphasizes the dynamic nature of a learner's capabilities and encourages a focus on the learning process rather than a static assessment of current skills.

Interventionist and interactionist DAs are two distinct approaches that stem from the dynamic assessment framework and share the common goal of integrating assessment and instruction to optimize learner development, albeit with different methodologies (Lantolf & Pohener,2006). Interventionist DA is structured and centers around a standard set of prompts and mediated learning experiences (Alshammari, 2022). The assessor provides predetermined assistance to all learners, often in the form of graduated prompts, and observes the changes in the learner's performance. This process helps to evaluate the learner's responsiveness to teaching and potential for learning (Tzuriel & Haywood, 1992). This model is prescriptive in that the assistance provided is consistent across learners, enabling examiners to compare performances based on how much and what type of assistance is required (Elliott, 2003). According to Poehener (2008), this approach lends itself well to qualitative research, where the focus is on patterns of learner response to systemic mediation. However, its structured nature may have limitations in capturing a learner's capabilities and learning processes(Lantolf & Poehner, 2008).

In contrast, interactionist DA adopts a more flexible approach, as it is inherently less standardized and more adaptive to individual learner differences. It is based on the dialogue between the assessor and the learner, with the assessor continuously adjusting the level and type of support based on the learner's displayed needs during the assessment (Poehner, 2008). Lantolf (2006) conceptualizes interactionist DA as a co-constructed process where the assessor and learner are engaged in a dialogic interaction, leading to a DA that unfolds in real-time. This conversational approach allows for more in-depth identification of the learner's zone of proximal development, as the assessor can probe, scaffold, and adjust feedback through interactive dialogue (Lantolf & Poehener, 2014). Interactionist DA is particularly sensitive to the learner's emerging understandings and often provides a rich, qualitative insight into the cognitive processes involved in the learner's performance. Linn (2010) believes that while interactionist DA allows for a more individualized profile of learner abilities, it can be more challenging to implement in group settings or standardized testing environments due to the high level of individual tailoring and the need for skilled assessors capable of real-time interpretation and intervention.

DA models have demonstrated significantly positive results in the speaking skills of EFL learners. Safdari & Fathi (2020) investigated the effect of implementing DA on Iranian EFL learners' speaking subskills and found that while students' speaking accuracy improved significantly via DA, their fluency did not. Furthermore, Ebrahimi (2015) explored the impact of DA on the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of Iranian EFL learners' oral production and reported similar results. However, Kao (2020) reported the results of her exploration of the influence of the interactionist DA on Chinese EFL learners' oral fluency in two levels of proficiency: elementary and advanced. The results suggested that interactionist DA effectively boosted learners' fluency at advanced levels, but this was not true for A1/A2 students.

Regarding the differences between DA models, Gilani et al.'s (2021) systematic literature review on DA in an EFL speaking context revealed that studies that directly or indirectly employed interactionist models in assessing speaking skills were more successful in postulating positive results. Nevertheless, to the current researchers' best knowledge, no studies have compared both models' effects on speaking subskills in a qualitative study through interviews. Therefore, the present study aimed at bridging the gap in DA literature by contextualizing the differences between DA models' impacts on speaking accuracy, complexity, and fluency.

Method
Participants
The study involved 30 undergraduate students at Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, all majoring in TEFL. The participants, recruited through convenience sampling, included 19 females and 11 males, aged between 21 and 35 and at the B1 level of language proficiency. They were all native Persian speakers with no English learning experience abroad. Half of the participants received speaking lessons through interactionist DA, and the other half via interventionist DA. The classes were held in ten sessions, each lasting 60 minutes in an online one-to-one format. The types of speaking activities and tasks were the same in both groups and included storytelling, TED Talk summarization, news sharing, and follow-up discussions. The only difference in the classes was how mediation, corrective feedback, and learning assessment were conducted. After the sessions, the participants were interviewed to share their reflections and thoughts on their experiences. It is important to note that the instructor and the interviewer were the same person (the first author) for all the participants to ensure consistency in the data collection process.

The participants were briefed on the study's objectives and procedures. They were assured of their right to withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable. Written consent was obtained from each participant prior to the study, indicating their voluntary involvement and ensuring confidentiality of their identity and responses. The interviews were scheduled based on the participants' convenience to prioritize their comfort.

Instruments

The data was collected in one-to-one online meetings (30 to 45 minutes) using a semi-structured interview. Eight open-ended questions (see Appendix A) prompted the participants to reflect on and share their learning experiences. The questions were developed after an extensive literature review of DA studies in EFL contexts. They were approved by the second author (associate professor in TEFL) with multiple publications in DA.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The online interviews were held one-on-one via the Google Meet platform and recorded after receiving the participants' written consent. Since the interview did not have any linguistic or instructional aim, and the authenticity of the responses was of high importance, the researchers assumed that the current L2 proficiency of the learners might have affected the participants' responses. To avoid linguistic barriers, the interviewer let the participants know they could answer all the questions in their first language (Farsi) or switch between L1 and L2 whenever they wanted. Additionally, they could ask the interviewer to clarify or translate the questions if needed. The recordings were transcribed and, if needed, translated for the thematic analysis.

The data analysis in this research utilized inductive thematic analysis, beginning with a thorough immersion in the data through repeated readings of the transcripts to discern patterns, meanings, and initial insights. The initial codes were then generated to capture meaningful units within the dataset and organized into preliminary themes through grouping and categorization. These themes were refined iteratively through constant comparison and review, ensuring coherence and consistency within each theme. Once stabilized, the themes were defined and named to represent the key findings of the analysis, accompanied by supporting evidence from the data. The trustworthiness and reliability of the analysis were enhanced by using measures such as researcher reflexivity through documenting the findings and referring back to them frequently to avoid possible biases and peer debriefing (with a Ph.D. candidate in TEFL who was not involved in the study). The

analysis resulted in a comprehensive thematic map that depicted the interrelationships between the identified themes, providing a structured overview of the research findings.

Design

The study used a grounded theory research design, which allowed the researchers to systematically identify patterns and themes within the qualitative data collected from the participants. This approach facilitated exploring EFL learners' experiences regarding interventionist and interactionist DA models.

Findings

The study's main objective was to analyze the differences between the impacts of DA models on speaking subskills based on the students' perceptions and reflections. Therefore, in the final analysis, only those themes that reflected such differences were considered and included differences in shaping learners' impressions, confidence, and beliefs about the subskills.

Difference in First Impressions

The participant's responses from both groups regarding their general experience with the course were positive, evident in the equal repetitions of such codes as *purposeful*, *helpful*, and *motivating*. However, nearly all members mentioned that the first couple of sessions were challenging. In the interactionist group's answers, the frequency of the new experience code was notably more than the answers of the interventionist group's learners. The novelty of the experience among these learners, especially in the first couple of sessions, when most of the negotiated mediations took place, looked challenging and, at the same time, encouraging. The participants noted that the challenge in the beginning sessions motivated them to be more actively engaged during class to figure out the methodology and aim of the course and how to benefit from it efficiently. One participant shared how she felt in the beginning sessions.

I really had no idea what exactly you were going to teach me, [and] it was a completely new experience to me. I wanted to know how you teach speaking. So, after session two, I decided to pay more attention to what [you] said, wrote, and emphasized. When I understood your teaching is very related to my needs, I enjoyed attending the course even more. (Participant S)

According to the interventionist group answers, the first-session challenges stemmed from unfamiliarity with the teacher's expectations. As a result, they asserted that they tried to be more active before the class to be well prepared.

Although you told me that it is just a speaking class, I couldn't ignore [the fact] that you are also my university professor, and it gave me stress. I tried to review everything and practice a lot so that you have a good judgment [of] my English [knowledge]. (Participant E)

The nature of the challenges differed, and the learners could handle them in the subsequent sessions; however, their initial impressions had an impact on their type of engagement until the end of the sessions. The learners' responses regarding their engagement in the interactionist group had more keywords suggesting *during class time*. However, the learners in the interventionist group were more active during the days leading to each session. Another piece of evidence supporting this idea was found in their answers to the question concerning class time. When asked whether they would like to change the timing of the class, the interactionist group learners preferred longer and more sessions per week. Participant R said,

"I believe we didn't have enough sessions. I would like to have more sessions, maybe two or even three [sessions] every week because I learned many new things in the class [that] I didn't learn in other classes or books."

The interventionist group's answers indicated that most would rather not change the class schedule. For instance, Participant T mentioned,

"For other classes, I never like only one session during [the] week, but your class was different, and some questions and activities were hard. I needed a lot of time to study. For me, one class [sic] a week was enough."

Difference in Speaking Confidence

The other notable difference was in the participants' perception regarding the impact of the course on their speaking confidence. All participants mentioned *self-confidence* as one of the main benefits of the courses, that is, the learners believed their positive attitude towards the instructions was mainly because of the improvement in their self-confidence. However, the

data suggest that the learners' perceptions of speaking confidence and its effects differed in the two groups.

For one thing, the participants in the interventionist group argued that the course developed their confidence, making them feel more prepared to take other speaking tests or participate in evaluative speaking activities, meaning that their enhanced confidence contributed to the improvement of achievement motivation. Participant M mentioned that her participation in the course boosted her confidence and enabled her to perform better even in some of her university courses, which required satisfactory grammatical accuracy and fluency. Participant P expressed that the mediation he received while being assessed helped him ameliorate his anxiety before the speaking tests by stating, *"In this class, I imagined you as a kind of examiner, and it pushed me to change my studying [habits] and have less stress for speaking tests like IELTS."*

In addition, their responses to whom they would recommend taking the course (as a follow-up to question 8) included keywords mainly referring to formal assessment situations such as job interviews, international exams, and final tests.

I suggest this class to my friends and classmates that they [who] want to get IELTS or TOFEL[certificates] because your method gives students confidence. You force students to practice speaking a lot, but you don't correct [the errors] like other teachers, and I think this is good for students like me who have low self-confidence. (Participant Z)

Some other participants in the interventionist group argued that the course boosted their speaking confidence to provide more extended responses. Six participants noted that they were not courageous enough to speak for more than a couple of sentences before, but in the last sessions of the course, their responses were longer, thanks to their self-confidence in speaking. Therefore, according to the data, the participants of the interventionist group's viewpoints concerning their experiences with the course indicated that the interventionist approach was an effective tool for assessment-preparation purposes.

The speaking confidence in the interactionist group was boosted differently and consequently had different impacts. Some participants in this group mentioned that their confidence grew during the first three to four sessions, which empowered them not only to accept the challenges imposed by the instructor but also to challenge themselves voluntarily. They felt more confident utilizing authentic learning materials and self-evaluation tools to

improve their verbal competency. Participant C mentioned that her confidence allowed her to *"evaluate herself more often by recording her voice and seeking [corrective] feedback from other instructors or friends without[fearing] negative judgments."* Participant D shared her enthusiasm when the researcher in the class approved her morphological discoveries. She said,

I understood I had more potential to learn English because of your method. Like the time I told you, I discovered the meaning of 'theocracy' without [a] dictionary and gave you more examples of government types like bureaucracy. When you approved them, I got happy, and for the first time felt very confident.

In addition, the participants' responses to whom they would recommend the course included codes referring to the EFL learners who were interested, motivated, and wanted to learn new things, supporting the idea that the interactionist group learners regarded the course as an opportunity to develop their language skills to move to a higher level of proficiency.

I'd recommend this class to my friends who really love English and want to improve. I don't mean that this class is not good for everyone, but if someone wants to learn English for routine [or everyday] conversations, he [or she] can go to normal English [schools]. This method is heavy [or demanding], and only motivated students can gain benefits[from] it. (Participant J)

Difference in Shaping Beliefs
One of the interview questions was the participants' evaluations regarding their progress in speaking subskills. As for grammatical range and accuracy, both groups stated that they felt improvement. The interactionist group responses entailed such codes as the instructor's diagnosis of problems, clear explanations, and relevant exercises. The data suggest that they attributed their improvement to ZPD-based mediations, assignments, and tasks. For instance, Participant L believed,

"I don't know how to say, but you knew exactly what my weaknesses were, and we practiced the grammar lessons again with other task [types]. For example, I [will] never forget not to use 'they'[emphasis added] after 'who' in relative clauses."

The learners in the interventionist group provided answers entailing challenge, practice, and test codes, which imply that they regarded the evaluative aspect of the course as a motivator to improve their speaking accuracy. As an example, a participant argued,

I should say my grammatical mistakes became fewer, especially when I had to answer [to] the questions [of the speaking tasks] the second time. It was like a second chance for me on a test, and I tried hard not to repeat the mistakes. (Participant Z)

For fluency subskill, the interventionist group's answers showed that they were satisfied with the impact of the treatment thanks to the instructor's mediation addressing the cohesion and coherence of their responses. Twelve participants in this group believed that one of the critical reasons for their improved fluency, apart from the confidence factor, was the teacher's guidance on the *content development* on their first attempt at each task. Participant P stated that knowing *"how to start, continue, and end a task"* helped her a lot with the flow of her speaking performance. Participant V believed that the teacher's feedback helped her *"to develop the content of her speech in an organized fashion,"* which positively influenced her fluency and coherence.

On the other hand, the answers of the interactionist group members varied. While five participants opined that they were more fluent compared to the beginning of the course, ten noted that the impact of the course on their speaking fluency was not satisfactory. Among the ones whose evaluation of fluency was positive, the most common reasons were the teacher's friendly behavior and low sensitivity to errors. Thus, their impression of better fluency was associated with augmented self-esteem, as evident in Participant H's answer:

I was always worried about my mistakes when I spoke with people who are at [a] higher level [of proficiency] like you. But after the discussions we had at the end of the sessions about the learning process, I got less worried about my mistakes. I also realized you did not correct all my mistakes.

The answers of the other learners suggested that they did not find the course helpful in improving their speaking fluency. Their chief reasons included focusing on new forms (more complex structures), self-corrections, and teacher interruptions as obstacles to maintaining fluency and coherence. Thus, the evidence suggests that these learners believed their progress in

grammar and pronunciation inhibited their fluency by encouraging them to pay more meticulous attention to the newly learned linguistic items and concepts. For instance, participant A shared why she had to lower her speed to care for sentence stress.

If I want to be honest, my speaking fluency did not improve much. I was very careful to find my mistakes that you said are fossilized [errors] and correct them myself, and I also was careful [and cautious] to follow the rules of sentence stress. It was hard for me to follow the rules and speak fluently at the same time.

In this regard, the participants also argued that their fluency did not change as much as their grammatical accuracy and complexity because the conversations about their performances were long, at times making them lose track of their thoughts. They asserted that they needed more time to remember what they intended to convey. However, in response to whether the compromise was worthwhile, they all responded positively. A summary of the keywords is presented in Appendix B.

Discussion

The present study suggested that based on learners' experiences and perceptions, interactionist and interventionist DA models promote different speaking subskills. Such differences can be attributed to how DA models shape learners' first impressions, speaking confidence, and beliefs about the subskills.

As for grammatical accuracy and complexity, the findings suggested that the participants in the interactionist DA group noticed more improvement in these areas. One explanation for this finding is that the interactionist model promotes more active participation of the learners in the learning process. In the same vein, Orikasa (2010) reported that the interactionist DA was effective in aiding students to overcome obstacles when forming grammatically complicated sentences through collaborative interactions with the instructor. Thus, it can be concluded that one of the reasons for the higher perceived efficiency of the interactionist DA than interventionist DA in improving the participants' grammatical accuracy and complexity was the provision of in-depth and personalized mediations and techniques that effectively addressed the learners' difficulties.

Another important finding in this regard was that integrating teaching and assessment and the non-standardized feature of the interactionist DA allowed the participants to be more aware of their learning styles and needs. As a

result, they would be more autonomous and resort to appealing strategies more freely and frequently than the interventionist approach. Implementing this strategy may have boosted the learners' motivation and autonomy, encouraging them to take risks and use more complicated grammatical structures. This finding was consistent with those of Ebadi (2016), Davidson et al. (2009), and Zoghi and Malmeer (2014). They reported that interactionist DA was beneficial for enhancing the learners' motivation, which has proven to be a determining factor in successfully internalizing syntactic rules (Dörnyei, 2001). For the learners' autonomy, Pawlak (2017) maintains that the mastery of speaking grammar is not limited to acquaintance with norms and the ability to apply them in conventional, controlled exercises but also includes the ability to deploy specific structures in spontaneous communication. To achieve this objective, students must practice grammar independently, and teachers who plan to promote their learners' autonomy may find interactionist DA more effective. This finding is in accordance with Ebadi and Asakereh (2017), who found that tailored mediation and individualized needs assessment in this DA model can lead to self-regulation.

Regarding fluency, the findings of the current study suggested that the interventionist group was more satisfied. While the interactionist DA model also entailed both instruction and evaluative functions, the standardized mediation provision of the interventionist model prompted the participants to form an impression of the course as a speaking test preparation opportunity and put a higher value on the evaluative aspect of the treatments. Such prioritization might have encouraged them to use different communicative, learning, and preparation strategies than the interactionist group, which favored fluency. This finding is supported by Bialystok (2002) and Oxford (2002). They assert that participants' perceptions of the language goals are crucial in selecting specific learning and communicative strategies.

In addition, the interventionist group learners' responses indicated that their engagement was more productive when doing before-the-class preparation to finish tasks successfully. This orientation increased the students' confidence in speaking and reduced their anxiety by minimizing explicit corrective feedback from the instructor, which takes place in the last two stages of mediation. Moreover, receiving explicit corrections instead of implicit guidance was perceived as a sign of incompetency in front of the teacher, which could have created stressful moments. Since anxiety has a significant negative impact on learners' fluency in speaking, the current researchers assume that students' perception of interventionist DA explicit corrections encouraged them to be more prepared to avoid anxious moments and as a result, more fluent. This explanation aligns with Zhang and Rahimi's

(2014) as well as Estaji and Farahanynia's (2019) findings, indicating that interventionist DA effectively decreased learners' anxiety.

On the other hand, the interactionist group's perception of the course aims differed due to their first and lasting impressions. In interactionist DA, mediation was deeply personal and did not concern a specific endpoint. The participants of this group perceived the assessment in the course as an opportunity to develop their speaking subskills after being exposed to a personalized mediation beyond the successful completion of speaking activities. Therefore, they were more likely to recognize their learning preferences and needs, monitor their mistakes, and conduct more self-evaluations. Such a mindset helped the learners make progress in forming more grammatically accurate and complex responses, but it did not allow their fluency to develop as much. Skehan's (2009) hypothesis that the focus on one (or more components) of complexity, accuracy, and fluency results in the negligence of the other one(s) provides further support to these findings.

The present study suggested that EFL learners find both DA models effective for improving their speaking skills; however, opinions differed regarding complexity, accuracy, and fluency. The perceived course aim and assessment type in interactionist DA promoted a mindset and learning orientation that desired to focus on learner autonomy. According to the learners' reflections, the course was an opportunity for them to be more aware of their learning styles and potentials rather than learning explicit correct forms for specific speaking tasks. However, this awareness hindered their fluency as they constantly monitored their grammatical range and accuracy and got involved in learning-related discussions with their teacher.

On the contrary, the findings indicated that interventionist DA was perceived as a better approach for achieving higher speaking fluency. The relatively standardized format of interventionist DA contributed to shaping a product-oriented mindset that prioritized fluency over the complexity component, urging them to use the strategies that reduced the frequency of the teacher's explicit corrections, indicating that they were more successful in communicating their ideas fluently at the expense of losing more in-depth learnable moments. The findings of this study suggest that the way corrections were handled in the interventionist model gave the learners the impression that the successful accomplishment of tasks was more critical than addressing specific learning pitfalls. This impression, along with the confidence factor, paved the way to an outcome-oriented mindset, contributing to the adoption of fluency preparation in pre-class engagements.

The findings of this study contribute to the DA literature by providing a new and contextualized perspective that can help interested researchers form

and test hypotheses about DA models' specific differences in speaking subskills. In addition, the findings of the present qualitative study have pedagogical implications for practicing teachers and teacher trainers. Instructors who want to implement DA into their speaking lessons can choose a DA model that suits their specific objectives better.

As the speaking subskills are not limited to the variables of this study, further investigations are required to provide insights into speaking vocabulary, pronunciation, and other components. In addition, future qualitative studies can be more beneficial if they adopt other research designs or use quantitative and experimental mixed methods.

Declaration of interest: None

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