Research Paper

Impact of Peer-Assisted Mediation vs. Teacher-Intervention on EFL Learners' Attitude toward Reading Comprehension Classes: Interventionist Dynamic Assessment in Focus

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Abstract

In this study, attempts were made to explore the impact of peer-assisted mediation and teacher intervention on the attitudes of Iranian intermediate English learners towards reading comprehension, within an intrusive dynamic assessment approach. For this purpose, 60 male language learners were selected and homogenized by applying the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) as the main participants of the study. They were randomly divided into three groups: Experimental group (GA), Peer mediation, Experimental group (GB), and Instructor intervention group (GC)—control group. An attitude questionnaire was administered to the participants in all three groups to collect the necessary data. Then the treatment started and lasted 12 sessions. Each group of participants received a specific treatment. The post-test was administered at the end of the treatment. Analysis of the results showed that peer-assisted mediation and teacher intervention in intrusive dynamic assessment had significant impacts on the reading comprehension attitudes of Iranian intermediate English learners. The findings of the study offered some pedagogical implications for language teachers and textbook developers.

Keywords: Attitude; Dynamic Assessment; Peer-assisted Mediation; Teacher-intervention

INTRODUCTION

Assessment can be divided into three main categories: assessment for accountability, assessment for learning, and dynamic assessment. While necessary to create assessment notes and use them for future placement decisions, assessment for learning aims to support teaching and learning, and dynamic assessment is considered an interactive approach that combines both teaching and assessment activities simultaneously (Thouesny, 2010). Dynamic Evaluation is an approach in which theoretical evaluation and guidelines are handled by Vygotsky with the Zone of Proximal Development. Reading is an interactive process that combines top-down and bottom-up processing; Consequently, it is crucial that students use appropriate reading skills to increase their understanding. Using appropriate reading skills requires appropriate training from talented peers or more knowledgeable others. Dynamic assessment is a good strategy to help students with this. The researcher of the study aims to empirically inspect the impact of peer-assisted mediation and teacher intervention in mediator dynamic assessment on the attitudes of Iranian intermediate English learners in reading

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comprehension classes and to compare the impacts of the two mentioned strategies.

Dynamic assessment is an approach that provides an analytic perception of where the student is at the same time as encouraging progress by presenting exact interventions or very small 'hints' to the student during the assessment procedure (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008).

Narrowing down the function of assessment as a mere information-collecting device not only generates a junction between teaching and assessment, it also competes against assessment directly to teaching. One probable means to syndicate two different but linked arenas is the growth of Dynamic Evaluation (hereafter DA). This recombination only happens when we add a mediation stage to our evaluation. DA includes a set of methods and materials for assessing learning possible, instead of a stationary level of attainment evaluated by traditional tests. Its purpose is to bring out distinct thorough performance by teaching or facilitating assessment and evaluating the resulting improved performance. DA is the interaction between the intermediary (trainer) and learners (Mardani & Tavakoli, 2011). This means that in this approach students provide feedback during the assessment. The mediator supports the development of learners and helps them increase their awareness, and mediation through interaction in activities is different. In fact, DA gives students opportunities to gain knowledge through directions, tips, and questions. DA can help language learners improve their language skills; i.e., reading comprehension.

Two formats are available in DA: the 'sandwich' and 'cake' approach. According to Lantolf and Poehner (2004), the sandwich format is based on a pre-test intervention post-test format run in an individual or group setting, reminiscent of traditional experimental research designs. In the cake format, the test taker is offered mediation during the assessment itself, which is taken from a standard menu of tips ranging from implicit to explicit. Mediation is a term used in the sociocultural SLA. Lantolf (2000, cited in Ellis, 2008) argued that mediation in second language learning includes: 1) mediation by others in social interaction, 2)

self-medication through private speech, and 3) mediation by artifacts (e.g., tasks, and technologies).

Dynamic Evaluation has become an important tendency for scholars and academics in recent years. It is defined as an approach that appreciates individual variances and their impact on teaching and entrenches intervention into the evaluation procedure by integrating proper forms of mediation that are sensitive to the individual's existing capabilities and succeeding acts to encourage student development (Lidz & Gindis, 2008).

The main feature that distinguishes dynamic assessment (DA) from other formative assessment forms is the mediation component assessment. In DA, some learning has to take place within the assessment. This means that students should receive feedback from the mediator during the assessment: answers to the questions being tested and clues as to where mistakes were made. The auditor plays a very important role as a mediator. Its responsibility is to bring about change in the student's cognition by providing constructive mediation in the student's learning process. Therefore, DA is structured to create an opportunity for interaction between students and agent(s) so that the agent(s) can evaluate the learners' learning process and the quality of the mediation (Teo, 2012).

Previous research studies have revealed that dynamic assessment is a successful teaching method to improve acquisition and learning (Isavi, 2012; Kozulin & Garb, 2002). Despite most of the previous studies on DA showing the positive impact of DA on skill domains, some studies on dynamic assessment have failed to address one or more domains. Other studies have addressed the impact of dynamic assessment on language skills. In many cases, they have touched the surface of one of the conceptualizations of the dynamic assessment process in language learning (Zoghi & Malmeer, 2013). Many dynamic assessment researchers have conducted their studies without appropriate input materials. Also, previous studies have been calibrated without considering the comparative impact of peer assessment and teacher intervention on the development of reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is a complex endeavor and presents the student with numerous dilemmas that can be traced back to a "lack of appropriate reading strategies and lack of background knowledge" (Altamimi, 2006, p. 24). However, these problems can be alleviated if not eliminated, with due care and the proper instruction. Another problem that English teachers in Iran face at universities is the large classrooms of around 70 students with different learning styles, expectations, interests, and motivations to learn English. In these cases, it is often not possible for teachers to meet the needs of every student or to include all of them in classroom activities. Also, due to the common teaching approaches mentioned above, some students have developed passive attitudes and will not be able to take responsibility for their learning processes. In this study, various types of dynamic assessment are suggested to increase the attitude levels of English learners in reading comprehension classes.

Reading instruction has been a central focus in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Iran, as English is a compulsory subject for students wishing to enter higher education. In most classrooms, one of the main focuses of the English curriculum is accurate translations, often from texts. According to Mehrpour, Sadighi, and Bagheri (2012), Iranian EFL students rely heavily on their decoding skills and tend to read word for word, sentence by sentence; and for a tertiary translation, they often refer to a bilingual dictionary. As they add, this analytical reading behavior is perhaps influenced by past learning experiences. Students are trained to focus on grammar, vocabulary, and translation from English to Persian and vice versa.

As a result, after entering higher education, students find reading academic textbooks written in English extremely difficult and frustrating because they rely heavily on native decoding skills and have limited knowledge of reading strategies to help them understand the text they encounter. Many students have no interest in reading; They learn English only to pass exams. Loss of motivation and inactive attitudes can prevent them from learning English.

In the last few years, some research has been done to find out how students' strategic reading can be facilitated (eg Chern, 1993; Shang, 2007; Shih, 1991). None of the studies conducted so far have made suggestions for solving dilemmas in order to increase students' strategic reading comprehension levels. To address the above issues, this study examines the impacts of peer-assisted intervention against teacher mediation in mediator dynamic assessment on the reading comprehension ability of Iranian intermediate English learners.

Based on the issues stated above, the three research questions below were addressed and the succeeding null hypotheses were formulated in the current study.

Q1: Does peer mediation have any significant impact on EFL learners' attitudes in reading comprehension classes?

Q2: Does teacher intervention have any significant impact on EFL learners' attitude in reading comprehension classes.?

Q3: Is there any significant difference between the impacts of peer mediation and teacher intervention on EFL learners' attitudes in reading comprehension classes?

H_{01}: Peer mediation does not have any significant impact on EFL learners' attitudes in reading comprehension classes.

H_{02}: Teacher intervention does not have any significant impact on EFL learners' attitudes in reading comprehension classes.

H_{03}: There is not a significant difference between the impacts of peer mediation and teacher intervention on EFL learners' attitudes in reading comprehension classes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Assessment Application to Aid Learning
Accordingly, as Wells (2000) states, the application of the Vygotskian hypothesis to education requires both an exploratory and community-oriented methodology for teaching and learning. This requires a reconceptualization of the curriculum so that educational activities require greater involvement of students and encourage them to go beyond themselves to move towards desired goals (Vygotsky, 1978). Undoubtedly, it is tried to envisage alternative

forms of teaching that will meet the prerequisites. "These changes necessarily begin in operating systems, educational settings, and environments where participants must be encouraged to be agents of change" (Wells, 2000, p. 57). Therefore, there is an urgent need for the implementation of dialogical and dialectical approaches in classrooms and schools, where students play an important role not only in their own learning but also in their assessment processes.

In this respect, assessment should be educationally supportive to assist the learning process. Therefore, to achieve this goal, we need to make evaluation more dynamic and change the social significance of evaluation (Shepard, 2000). To seriously use assessment to improve learning, Shepard (2000) argues that the pervasive negative impacts of testing must be acknowledged.

Teachers need to find a way to protect their evolving understanding of constructivist assessment practices from the pervasive test-driven curriculum. For example, Shepard (2000) suggests that students may be encouraged to keep parallel note sets for a set of 'real' information and a set of information they will need for the test. Shepard also includes dynamic assessment as an impactive strategy that can be applied to change existing cultural practices in terms of learning, teaching, and assessment.

After applying assessment to expand the performance of SLA students, one of the assessment methods supporting language learning was introduced by Vygotsky (1978). This type of evaluation was a dynamic one.

Historical Overview of Dynamic Assessment
The historical background of foreign language programs has been portrayed by a long tradition of standard testing as the most dependable process for revealing students' language capacities. This form of learners' language ability, initiated by Vygotsky (1978), has been questioned as it underestimates learners' abilities, highlights growing alterations among learners, and therefore more precisely takes into account their capabilities. This was alongside the appreciation that collaboration is

a necessary and impactive language assessment device (Swain, 2001).

Dynamic assessment was consequently formed to offer a monistic method for both assessment and teaching, based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of mind and specifically the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. Williams and Burden (2002) believe that dynamic assessment (DA) is "a term in social constructionism first introduced by Feuerstein and defined as a way of assessing students' true potential in a way that differs significantly from traditional testing".36).

As noted by Poehner (2008), the importance of the idea of DA lies in the development of the collaborative nature of learning developed according to mediation theory and the evaluation procedure by the ZPD. DA to the individual; For example, the instructor unilaterally evaluates the student as incompetent and sees assessment as a reciprocal procedure concerning collaboration between both parties. Therefore, the evaluator engages in a dialogue with evaluators to learn about current performance levels and to share possible ways to take this level of performance one pace more (Williams & Burden, 2002). More prominently, DA realizes learning and assessment as a solitary concept and thus discards non-dynamic methods of teaching and testing where learning and assessment are divided into two.

Poehner (2008) believes that the absence of a learning step during the assessment that causes the learners' core abilities to be underestimated is a major obstacle in existing assessment procedures. Opposing the standard in the traditional test, which emphasizes the autonomous operation of students, DA suggests a more wide-ranging and humanitarian method in which students are evaluated according to their evaluated and unevaluated performances (Anton, 2009). Therefore, a reflection of a single performance will be insufficient if one wants to comprehend developmental procedures and present interventions essential to support students in coming over problems and assist them in their ZPD (Caffrey, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008).

As an alternative, dynamic coordinated effort simultaneously with individuals will

disclose the complete degree of learner capacities. The key to a monistic understanding of teaching and assessment is to depend on mediation, which is demarcated as the suitable method of backing (Poehner, 2008). In this direction, the instructor has the capacity to both understand and develop the capacities of the students. Sternberg and Gregorenko (2002) state that DA is a pattern shift towards a new viewpoint of assessment, and assessment intends to aid individual learners to improve through intervention.

Theoretical Origins of Dynamic Assessment
The term dynamic evaluation has its roots in Vygotsky's colleague Luria (1961), who first coined it in his English writings on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Mind (SCT) (Lantolf, 2006). Vygotsky believed that human abilities are in constant flux and are highly sensitive to two sources of mediation, symbolic and physical means, that can fuel learning mechanisms (Lantolf, 2006).

Dynamic evaluation (DA) refers to a procedure that addresses such changing features and capabilities. For Vygotsky, learning was considered a progression between two points, the point of independent study and the point of dependent study. He named this symbolic area the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), an idea he offered as an alternative to the world-renowned traditional IQ test by providing only a static measure of fully matured abilities (Lantolf, 2006).

Vygotsky came to the concept of the zone of proximal development when he realized that two children of the same age and with the same IQ scores benefited from training sessions in various ways. He learned that although the two children were developmentally the same age, they were not the same age mentally. This difference between chronological age and mental age is what he technically calls the zone of proximal development, which he defines as "the distance between the actual level of development determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development determined by problem-solving." adulthood "in guidance or in collaboration with more capable others" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85,

cited in Lantolf, 2006). ZPD is thought of as a multistage progression and continuum rather than a single point in time.

ZPD and Its Use in Dynamic Assessment
According to Ableeva and Lantolf (2011), Vygotsky (1978) believed that ZPD was the gap between the student's supported and independent performances and stated that ZPD would be the distance between the student's knowledge and the actual level of development. The potential developmental level is determined under adult guidance or in collaboration with more talented peers. Based on this type of collaboration, mediation was used to measure the student's ZPD area.

This mediation was an important part of the dynamic evaluation (DA). The theoretical concept of dynamic assessment was the basis of Vygotsky's ZPD, which integrates mediation and assessment into a unified pedagogical activity (Ableeva & Lantolf, 2011). By combining both learning and testing in the same teaching activity, dynamic assessment helps the student while trying to realize the language required to perform a specific task (Allal & Pelgrims Ducrey, 2000). In DA, the instructor or tester becomes a mediator between the student's current ability and the desired performance of the targeted language trait. This mediation is key to the DA process in the student's ZPD. In this context, Poehner (2008) stated, "The DA requires the examiner to mediate the test taker's performance during assessment using directions, clues, and questions" (p. iii).

The mediator can determine exactly what language skills and knowledge are required for the student to achieve the desired independent performance. The DA process enables agents to evaluate the abilities and immature abilities of the person from whom more information is obtained than traditional static assessment can measure (Grigorenko and Sternberg, 2002). Due to established Western traditions and convictions regarding the validity and reliability of a test (Bachman, 1990; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010), dynamic assessment can only constitute a diagnosis of a student's current abilities and potential learning abilities;

that is, dynamic assessment cannot replace traditional testing. "The findings suggested that DA would be an effective tool in understanding students' abilities and helping them overcome language problems" (Poehner, 2008, p. iv).

METHODOLOGY
Design of the Study
The design of the current study was quasi-experimental, with pre-test and post-test plans. There were three groups: one control and two experimental groups. Each group received a pre-test before the treatment, and a post-test at the end of the period for their score comparison.

Materials
The following materials used in the current study were extracted from *New Headway* (Fourth Edition, Intermediate) by Soars and Soars (2013), and *Select Readings Intermediate* by Lee and Gundersen (2013). According to the authors, these books are specially designed for intermediate-level students and contain appropriate texts which boost students' reading comprehension.

Participants
The population for this study consisted of 80 male and female Persian-speaking EFL learners at two English language institutes, aging between 18 to 23 years, with 3 to 4 years of learning background. They were homogenized by running the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). The learners who scored 28 to 36 (lower-intermediate) in this test were considered the main sample of the study. They were assigned to three groups: the experimental group (GA), the peer mediation experimental group (GB), and the teacher-intervention control group (GC).

Instruments
The subsequent instruments were employed in the current research:

Proficiency Test
Oxford Placement Test of English Language (OPT) was run to homogenize the participants. The sample of the Oxford placement test employed in this study comprised two parts: part

A: 40 items, part B: 20 items. This test took about 70 minutes. Based on OPT Direction, scores of 1-17 are considered Beginners, 18-27 (Elementary), 28-36 (Lower- intermediate), 37-47 (Upper-intermediate), 48-55 (Advanced), and 56-60 (very advanced).

Reading Pre-test
A pre-test prepared by the researcher was run to reveal the reading comprehension skills of language learners before the treatment. The pretest contained 20 multiple-choice reading items selected from Select Readings by Lee and Gundersen (2013). The readability of the texts was evaluated in order to prepare passages suitable for reading comprehension difficulties.

Reading Post-test
After treatment, all participants underwent a pre-piloted, investigative post-test based on the content taught during treatment. The post-test comprised 20 selected multiple-choice reading items.

Language Learning Attitude Questionnaire
This attitude measurement questionnaire focuses on students' attitudes towards learning English. It was used to inspect the differences in the attitudes of the participants according to their demographic information. It consists of 18 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from Level 1: Strongly Disagree to Level 5: Strongly Agree.

Procedures
Data Collection Procedure
At the beginning of the research, the OPT test was applied to the population of the research, and 60 of the 80 students whose scores ranged from 18 to 23 were selected as intermediate-level participants. They were then randomly assigned to 3 groups: the experimental group (GA), the peer mediation experimental group (GB), the and teacher intervention control group (GC).

In order to collect the necessary data, an attitude questionnaire was applied to all three groups. The pre-test aimed to catch the first differences between them in terms of attitudes. During the treatment phase of the study,

specific treatment was administered to each participant group. Treatment for the peer mediation group was based on the point that the focus was on the individual learner or students without predetermined endpoints (Poehner, 2008). In the treatment for the teacher-intervention group, the teacher explained grammar issues related to indefinite constructions in each session and handed out a reading comprehension test at the end of the session. In this model, students took the first dynamic assessment process before the language program, and a student-specific program was designed based on their findings. A more accurate descriptive designation of this DA approach is the test-teach-test. In the treatment of the control group, the teacher gave the participants reading passages followed by comprehension questions. She asked the participants to read the texts and answer the questions.

The teacher actually followed the traditional method of teaching reading, which included reading the text, answering comprehension questions, and teaching new difficult words and grammatical structures of the texts.

At the end of the treatment, a post-test conducted by the researcher was administered to all participants, and the results were equated with the pre-test results to find answers to the research questions.

Data Analysis Procedure
To analyze the data obtained, analysis of variance was used to compare the pretest and posttest mean scores of the three groups. In addition, the pretests of the three groups were compared with each other using ANOVA. To find out which group performed better, the posttests of all three groups were compared with each other using the ANOVA test.

RESULTS
The statistical analysis of the obtained data entailed the results presented in the following tables:

Testing the first hypothesis
The initial research null hypothesis was:

H01: Peer mediation does not have a significant impact on the attitudes of English learners.

The results of post hoc comparisons in Table 2 showed that the mean difference between the attitude score of the peer mediation condition and the attitude score of the control condition (MD = 2.28) was significant at $P<.05$. Therefore, these results revealed that peer mediation could definitely affect the attitudes of English learners.

Testing the Second Hypothesis
The second research null hypothesis was:
H02: Teacher intervention does not have a significant impact on the attitudes of English learners.

The results of the post hoc comparisons in Table 2 showed that the mean difference between the attitude score of teacher intervention and the attitude score of the control condition (MD = 2.76) was significant at $P <.05$. Therefore, these results show that teacher intervention may definitely affect the attitudes of English learners.

Testing the Third Hypothesis
The third research null hypothesis was:
H03: There is no significant difference between the impacts of peer mediation and teacher intervention on the attitudes of English learners.

The data in Table 2 displayed that the mean difference between the attitude scores of the first experimental group and the attitude scores of the second experimental group was not noteworthy at $P<.05$ (MD= .483).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
With the emergence of new academic fields, reading skill has gained an important place among other language skills and elements. The reason for this lies in the nature of academic studies in the relevant literature. Therefore, reading comprehension skills play an important role in students' understanding and learning. In this research, attempts were made to examine the impacts of peer-assisted mediation versus teacher intervention in mediator dynamic assessment on the attitudes of Iranian intermediate English learners in

reading classrooms. Based on the results, teacher intervention in both peer-assisted mediation and intrusive dynamic assessment has a significant impact on Iranian English learners' attitudes in reading comprehension classrooms.

Table 1
Estimated Marginal Means

Estimates

Dependent Variable	Groups	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Post.Attitude	Peer-Mediation	16.100[a]	.599	14.899	17.300
	Teacher-Intervention	16.583[a]	.600	15.380	17.786
	Control	13.817[a]	.601	12.613	15.021

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pre. Attitude = 13.5333.

Table 2
Pairwise Comparisons

Pairwise Contrasts

Dependent Variable	(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.[b]	95% Confidence Interval for Difference[b]	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Post. Attitude	Peer-Mediation	Teacher-Intervention	-.483	.848	1.000	-2.576	1.610
		Control	2.283*	.849	.028	.186	4.380
	Teacher-Intervention	Peer-Mediation	.483	.848	1.000	-1.610	2.576
		Control	2.766*	.852	.006	.663	4.869
	Control	Peer-Mediation	-2.283*	.849	.028	-4.380	-.186
		Teacher-Intervention	-2.766*	.852	.006	-4.869	-.663

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

The findings of this study indicate that learners participating in dynamic assessment can have a positive impact on their attitudes in reading comprehension lessons. Also, students involved in dynamic assessments can help language learners make decisions about their own learning experiences and develop into self-directed learners with sufficient valor to face new texts containing unknown words and information.

The findings of this research are in line with the findings of previous studies. Cotterall (1990) discovered that in the context of L2, pre-college students are not habituated to taking obligation for their own learning. They still depend on the instructor as their foundation of information. In research by Maloch (2002) to show how a third-grade teacher presented literature discussion groups, he noted the arduous nature of the shift from a teacher-supported teaching format to a peer-led teaching format in a student-made teaching environment, not knowing how to take responsibility for their own learning. Maloch's work emphasized the requirement to increase an intentional and advanced application procedure so that instructors have distinct strategies to track in order to assume leadership in language classes.

The implications of this study for language teachers are as follows: teachers ought to offer practices that can have a constructive impact on language learners' attitudes. To realize this, they must pay attention to the topics and content of the reading passages. They should also take this point into account because language learners should feel quite free to participate in classroom activities without any stress. The findings also have implications for materials designers to generate materials based on language learners' needs. In fact, materials

should be carefully chosen, categorized, and arranged in a manner that aids language learners become more self-directed and obtain positive attitudes.

As a final point, this study can be re-run under the following conditions: One of the variables that need further research is the gender of the language learners. Here, the participants were all male students. Thus, the study can be replicated with both male and female language learners. Another variable is language proficiency level. Therefore, this study can be done for different language proficiency levels to observe possible differences in results.

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Biodata

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