REVIEW PAPERS

IMPLEMENTING DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT IN ASSESSING VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT: WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS

By

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ABSTRACT

The current literature review reports the results of four international research studies conducted within recent years to investigate the effectiveness of implementing Dynamic Assessment (DA) in assessing vocabulary development of English language learners. The results of the literature review highlight the positive effects of implementing DA in vocabulary acquisition despite the fact that the researchers found few studies that discussed DA for vocabulary development. This literature review includes a brief summary of the current research from 2015-2018, limiting the findings of DA to vocabulary development, and suggesting guidelines for implementing DA in language classrooms and for future research. The theoretical background of DA supports its applicability to classroom practices, based on the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky. The opportunity provided for the learners during the implementation of DA furthers cognitive, language, and developmental skills. The finding of this literature review highlights the applicability of DA in language classrooms for vocabulary development from the point of view of sociocultural theory.

Keywords: English Language Learners, Dynamic Assessment, Literature Review, Vocabulary Development, Sociocultural Theory.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the most demanding aspects of language learning and requires extensive time and attention for language learners. Learning "8000–9000-word families for reading, and perhaps as many as 5000–7000 families for oral discourse" (Schmitt, 2008, p. 329) is a daunting task for learners. Although second language learners may not use this number of words in their productive skills, they will be administered tests on these words in language assessment and evaluation. Knowing that assessment is part of learning can be a motivating factor for language learners to persevere and learn a large number of words.

A variety of reasons exist for a review of the literature on the importance of Dynamic Assessment (DA) in vocabulary development. First, the critical importance of vocabulary learning gives vocabulary assessment "the same priority as other skills in that the important cornerstones of testing (validity, reliability, practicality, washback, authenticity, transparency, and security) need to be considered in designing and evaluating tests of lexical knowledge and use" (Coombe, 2010, p. 113). Ebad, Weisi, Monkaresi, and Bahramlou (2018) highlighted the importance of assessment and argued that learning and assessment must go hand in hand because "separating learning from assessment would result in withholding assistance to the learners during the assessment process and would stall the learner development" (p. 5). Secondly, as this literature review reveals, many teachers are unaware of DA as a viable tool for vocabulary development. Third, with a deeper assessment of learners' vocabulary, instructional design coupled with DA has the potential to improve students' performance. Deep vocabulary knowledge means the learner has mastered "many different aspects of words, including their morphology and syntax, usage, semantic relationships, and connotations, among other things" (McKeown, Deane, Scott, Krovetz, & Lawless 2017, p. 50).

Since vocabulary is "multidimensional, incremental, and a

relatively open-ended domain" (McKeown et al., 2017, p. 33) and every individual possesses different words with varying degrees of knowledge and experience, vocabulary assessment needs to be comprehensive enough for assessing the words of language learners with differing vocabulary expertise and depth of vocabulary knowledge. The objective of the current literature review focuses on Dynamic Assessment (DA), as an alternative form of assessment, specifically in terms of vocabulary assessment, by providing a review of the most current research carried out during the past three years (2015-2018) published in international, peer-reviewed journals, as there are currently no comprehensive literature reviews of this subject. This review answers two research questions by providing a summary and findings of four recent studies that have implemented DA to measure vocabulary knowledge of English language learners.

The research questions are as follows:

- How does dynamic assessment, as an alternative for traditional assessment, meet the theoretical and practical criterion for the assessment of vocabulary?

- How effective is dynamic assessment in ESL classroom practices in terms of vocabulary assessment?

1. Literature Review

Based on the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978), Dynamic Assessment (DA) is a form of dynamic interaction that assesses the difference between the actual level and the potential level of the learner, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The focus of DA is on the process of learning rather than the product and helps the teacher determine the potential level of the learner by providing support and scaffolding. The social interaction that occurs between teacher and learner enhances the possibility for the learner to reach his or her potential developmental level. In the educational field, DA supports the teaching and learning process through a formative assessment approach with mediated instruction. Rather than using a traditional pre-assessment, intervention, and post-assessment, DA focuses more directly on the classroom interactions between the teacher and learner. In other words, DA provides the learner with a knowledgeable other, the teacher, to identify gaps in

learning and assist the learner through hints and suggestions to learn the vocabulary.

Originally, it was the intention that dynamic assessment would replace the traditional forms of assessment in language learning (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004; Poehner, 2008). Researchers make a distinction between traditional and alternative forms of Dynamic Assessment (DA) and believe that the focus of traditional forms is on cognitive functions (Kozulin, 2011) while the focus of alternative forms is on concept development and how the learner processes the received knowledge to develop proficiency. Davin (2016) specified the differences between these two forms of DA, mentioned by Kozulin (2011) and Lidz (2014), noting that Cognitive DA, traditional dynamic assessment, seeks "to directly promote the maturation of higher mental functions through cognitive enrichment programs. The alternative form, Curricular DA, seeks to modify cognition through concept development within a given subject content" (p. 815).

Dynamic Assessment (DA) provides the learner with opportunities to interact with knowledgeable others through instructions and steps to complete the tasks and to gain mastery over them by measuring the learner's performance in performing similar tasks in the future (Kirschenbaum, 1998). DA focuses on both teaching and assessment at the same time by integrating feedback with the instruction. Stiggins (2007) states the importance of learners using their own descriptive feedback. DA provides this opportunity by integrating self-assessment into the DA process. As Stiggins states, learners can use descriptive feedback to improve performance "using the language of the rubric" providing another opportunity for language development in general (p. 24).

2. Methodology

The researchers have chosen a systematic literature review as the methodology in order to explore the implementation of dynamic assessment in English Language Learning classrooms and to provide answers to the following questions:

- Does dynamic assessment, as an alternative for traditional assessment, meet the theoretical and

practical criterion for the assessment of vocabulary?

• Is dynamic assessment applicable to ESL classroom practices in terms of vocabulary assessment?

Four research articles, cited in this literature review, were the only available articles published in international, peer-reviewed journals in the last three years, 2015-2018, based on Scopus, SJR, Elsevier's abstract citation database, and Clarivate websites. Dynamic assessment, vocabulary acquisition, and vocabulary development were the keywords used in the Google search bar to find the scholarly articles. The researchers also used ProQuest limiting key terms to dynamic assessment, vocabulary, English language learners, and second language learners. Four studies applied dynamic assessment to assess English language learners' vocabulary knowledge in using empirical research. A summary of the research articles are shown below in Table 1.

2.1 Study One

In a research study conducted by Ebadi et al. (2018), two different types of assessment, including static assessment vs. DA, measured participants' meaning inference of unfamiliar words. Lexical inferencing is a vocabulary learning strategy (Yousefi and Ahadzadeh, 2017), used for "making informed guesses as to the meaning of a word, in light of all available linguistic cues in combination with the learner's general knowledge of the world, her awareness of context and her relevant linguistic knowledge"

(Haastrup,1991, p. 40).

Ebadi et al. (2018) proposed three different research questions in order to investigate which type assessment, Dynamic vs. Static, leads to successful inference of lexicon, longer retention of words, and improved ability of learners to transfer inferencing to new texts and situations. Originally 80 intermediate EFL (English as a Foreign Language) participants were assigned randomly to two groups; however, only 72 remained in the study. The experimental group received CDA (Computerized DA) with five texts that had less than 3% of unfamiliar words for the participants. A CDA software tool that had all the necessary features for dynamic assessment used a specific medium of instruction for the experimental group incorporating four highlighted target words in each text. "After each target word a paraphrase showing the meaning of the target word in simpler words was entered along with four simple distracter paraphrases" (p. 8). In order to focus on the lexical inferencing, there were "four mediational hints" for each word, based on the above-mentioned clues. The control group received the paper-based format of the same test with no mediations provided for target words. A pre-test and post-test were administered before and after each text during the intervention.

After five weeks of intervention (one week for each text), the results of the descriptive statistics showed that the CDA group outperformed the SA group; i.e., the first group

Study	Authors	Participants	DA Study Intervention	Results
1	Ebadi et al. (2018)	80 intermediate EFL students, ages 16-24	Through a software program, struggling learners received graduated mediational hints for each target word.	Vocabulary gains in CDA (Computerized DA) were higher in the CDA group than in the control group.
2	Hamavandi, Rezai, and Mazdayasna (2017)	50 intermediate EFL learners, ages 14-18	Ten stimulus items from the DATMA (Dynamic Assessment Task of Morphological Analysis) were presented to the experimental group, then gradual hints were provided by the instructor.	DA of morphology developed EFL learners' reading comprehension.
3	Mirzaei, Shakibei, and Jafarpour (2017)	50 EFL junior high students, ages 15-16	A vocabulary knowledge scale was administered to both control and experimental groups, and then the experimental group included interactionist cumulative DA using both implicit and explicit hints and prompts.	Group DA helped the learners outperform the non-DA group. The use of ZPD-based collaborative frameworks helped learners develop deeper word knowledge.
4	Hanifi, Nasiri, and Aliasin (2016)	25 ESP (English for Specific Purposes) Iranian BA students	To enhance participants' awareness of the strategies of identifying, evaluating, and monitoring vocabularies through a mediation process.	Participants' incidental vocabulary learning was enhanced dramatically using DA, especially through the structured hints for the mediation process.

Table 1. Summary of Dynamic Assessment in Assessing Vocabulary Development

gained higher scores than the second group. To answer the research questions, a one-way MANOVA was run showing that a) the selection of the assessment framework can have effects on the performance of the participants, b) CDA helps the acquisition and retention of target words, and c) CDA also improves the lexical inferencing ability of the participants to do near transfer tasks. An independent sample t-test was run and analyzed to compare the difference between the experiment group's mediated and the control group's unmediated near transfer scores. The results of the t-test "provided clear evidence of superior transfer of learning in the CDA group" (p. 14).

Administered to the participants were delayed post-tests to compare the retention level of the target words between the two groups of participants. The results of the four-week delayed post-test revealed a significant difference between CDA and SA groups' vocabulary retention. The results showed that the CDA group outperformed and gained a higher level of vocabulary retention in comparison to the SA group.

2.2 Study Two

Hamavandi et al. (2017) conducted a research study and aimed to investigate morphology awareness of the English language learners by implementing dynamic assessment. The study defined morphological awareness as the ability of a speaker of a language to understand, notice, and manipulate the words of that language, as well as recognizing different parts of the words such as prefix and suffix to turn them into morphologically new words (Apel, 2014). The researchers implemented DA to measure the effects that morphological awareness can have on understanding a morphologically unfamiliar text.

Two research questions were proposed. The first research question was about the effects DA might have on the reading comprehension of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The second research question focused on the scores of two adapted tasks from DATMA (Dynamic Assessment Task of Morphological Analysis), developed by Larsen and Nippold (2007), and TMS (Test of Morphological Structure), developed by Carlisle (2000). Divided equally into two groups were 50 female students, intermediate

language learners aged from 14 to 18. The researchers followed the "test, teach, retest design" which is a typical form of DA (Gibson, Jarmulowicz, & Oller, 2018, p. 329). The administration of the NDRT was the pre-test for both groups, control and experimental group, to measure their basic knowledge of reading comprehension. The results of an independent sample t-test showed no significant difference between these two groups indicating that participants of both groups possess similar reading comprehension levels and are homogeneous.

"The conceptual framework of the prompting system" during the second phase of the study had a "graduated prompting system" included in "the Dynamic Assessment Task of Morphological Analysis (DATMA)" (Hamavandi et al., 2017, p. 4). The experimental group received ten items (stimulated from the DATMA) in both auditory and written forms "displayed on an index card to the students in one-on-one testing sessions" (p. 4). This procedure, used as a type of scaffolding, determined the meaning of each prompted word as well as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) border of each student. The scoring rubric ranged from zero, not correct explanation, to five, correct and complete answer. Each prompting required by the student resulted in one-point deduction.

The results of an independent t-test of the post-test revealed that the experimental group which received Dynamic Assessment (DA) as a medium of instruction, outperformed the control group in terms of reading comprehension revealing a significant effect on the reading comprehension of the EFL learners. The findings of the study also showed the morphological analysis ability of the English language learners "as a significant predictor of reading comprehension" (Hamavandi et al., 2017, p. 9). These results indicate that EFL learners' knowledge of the morphology, as well as having an ability to derive meaning from words that are morphologically complex can "contribute to an EFL learners' ability to derive meaning from reading passages" (Hamavandi et al., 2017, p. 9).

2.3 Study Three

Mirzaei et al. (2017) conducted a study on collaborative vocabulary learning by focusing on ZPD-based dynamic

assessment. The authors focused on the possible effects that group dynamic assessment can have on the depth of English language learners' vocabulary knowledge. In other words, the vocabulary knowledge of the language learner includes pronunciation, morphology, frequency, and so on (Henriksen, 1999; Read, 2000).

Selected for this study were 50 female students, aged 15 to 16, at the beginning level of English language development. The administration of the Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT) measured the general language knowledge of the participants and determined the homogeneity of the participants. Two groups of randomly assigned homogeneous participants were divided into an experimental group and a control group (25 students per group). Before and after the intervention, each student took a vocabulary test developed by the authors to measure the word knowledge of the 15 target words based on the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (Wesche & Paribakht, 1996). To compare the pretest and posttest results of the study, a translation task asked participants to use target words in sentences. This task applied to the study "to formulate hypotheses about the participants' developmental levels and at the right time, provide the ZPD participants with appropriate prompts or scaffolding" (Mirzaei et al., 2017, p. 118).

The main instruction for the experimental group included five sessions of "interactionist cumulative G-DA [Group Dynamic Assessment]" by providing the participants "with the necessary mediation attuned to their hypothetical ZPD levels" (Mirzaei et al., 2017, p. 119). The mediation included hints and prompts delivered implicitly to explicitly while the participants of the control group received a direct and explicit form of instruction for their error correction without providing support.

The results of the SPANOVA analysis for pretest, immediate, and delayed posttest revealed "significant over-time mean differences between the groups (i.e., G-DA and N-DA) occurred at some points in time (i.e., from pretest to immediate posttest, or to delayed posttest)" (Mirzaei et al., 2017, p. 120). The results highlighted the effectiveness of implementing cumulative G-DA in gaining deeper L2

vocabulary knowledge. The results confirmed the efficacy of the cumulative G-DA on the long-term word retention of the participants. Furthermore, the authors analyzed qualitatively the nature of assistance received by the participants "in internalizing the new knowledge for intramental functioning" (Mirzaei et al., 2017, p. 121). The results of the qualitative analysis supported the idea of contributing "both diagnostic and developmental potentials" in increasing deeper vocabulary knowledge gain of the English language learners (Mirzaei et al., 2017, p. 114).

2.4 Study Four

Hanifi et al. (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental research design investigating the effectiveness of DA on incidental vocabularies emerging in technical reading textbooks written for electronic engineering students. The administration of a pre-test checked whether the students had previous knowledge of the target words. Then DA procedures, which were hints provided by the researchers to the full group, were implemented.

Group DA focuses on the interaction between members of a group in which the interaction between members of the group will lead to the development of the potential level of the group members. Poehner (2009) stated that in addition to the individual learner's ZPD in G-DA, the group's ZPD is a necessary factor. Mirzaei et al. (2017) implemented group dynamic assessment to explore its effects on vocabulary learning of the L2 learners. The results of the study indicated that participants' incidental vocabulary learning improved.

3. Discussion

Analysis of the four studies guided the answer to the research question, "How does dynamic assessment, as an alternative for traditional assessment, meet the theoretical and practical criterion for the assessment of vocabulary?" The authors agree that the results of the studies were positive, based on theoretical concepts, and supported the assessment of vocabulary. In all cases, the language learners benefitted from the hints and mediations provided by the instructor in individual or group settings. For the second research question, "How effective is dynamic assessment in ESL classroom practices in terms of vocabulary assessment?" the four studies support the

applicability of dynamic assessment implementation in ESL classrooms for vocabulary development.

van der Veen, Dobber, and van Oers (2016) emphasized that a collaborative and interactive relationship between teachers and educators "mediated through tools (i.e., DA instruments and materials)" may make a difference in future teaching and assessment processes (p. 329). The "test, teach, retest design" has been used in all of the above-mentioned research studies to assess vocabulary knowledge of the language learners. By implementing this approach in classroom practices, the teacher will be able to gain a clearer picture of the learners' previously constructed vocabulary knowledge as well as deciding on the future teaching strategies, techniques, and methods. DA provides an opportunity not only for teachers to learn more about language learners' previous vocabulary knowledge, but it also provides ways to plan for mediated instruction. DA applies directly to the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky by providing scaffolding for learners. This scaffolding support allows the learner to move forward to arrive at the potential level through interaction and collaboration.

4. Limitations of these Studies

These studies were limited to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) contexts. As the number of cited international papers in this literature review indicates, limited research on dynamic assessment (DA) and its implementation in vocabulary assessment and development has been investigated. van der Veen et al. (2016) mentioned four reasons for ignoring DA by teachers as well as referring to the problems that teachers might face while implementing DA. The first reason is time limitations: school policies enforce the use of standardized tests rather than DA for the purposes of assessment. The second reason stems from teachers' insufficient knowledge of how to integrate assessment into teaching. Teachers and educators need support and professional development in order to effectively integrate DA into teaching practices. The third reason is the lack of teachers' self-assessment skills. In other words, "deliberate reflection on their own role in simultaneously stimulating and evaluating children's development in the context of a

single activity is something teachers experience as difficult" (van der Veen et al., 2016, p. 339). Teachers must play an important role in curriculum design and evaluation to be able to assess their own ongoing activities as well as learners' development simultaneously. The final reason concerns the lack of opportunity for teachers, educators, and researchers to interact cooperatively and collaboratively "to further elaborate the dialectical relation between instruction and assessment for use in classroom practice" (van der Veen et al., 2016, p. 339).

The gap between teachers and their knowledge of implementing DA demonstrates the need for continued professional development regarding successful assessment of language learning, particularly vocabulary assessment. Researchers need to focus on techniques and strategies that can bridge this gap. Implementation of DA in the classroom is a recommended and proven strategy to narrow the gap. For example, vocabulary assessment could be strengthened by connecting vocabulary teaching strategies and DA. The authors of this literature review strongly suggest that researchers continue to study how DA can be used for vocabulary development and that administrators provide training for teachers on how to use this method to engage students and promote language acquisition.

Conclusion and Future Studies

The results of the current literature review highlight the effectiveness of implementing Dynamic Assessment (DA) in vocabulary assessment of English language learners. The four studies mentioned have used the same design, "test, teach, retest," to implement dynamic assessment in vocabulary assessment. The analysis of the results of the pretests and post-tests of the studies highlight the applicability of DA as a promising intervention in vocabulary development and suggests that DA can lead to the development of language teaching and assessment in such a way that makes language teaching easier and language learning more productive. The results also confirm for these four studies the effectiveness of DA in vocabulary learning and retention since the results of the post-tests and delayed post-tests are better than the results

of the pretests.

Based on the results of the Dynamic Assessment (DA) studies and the strong theoretical underpinnings, DA is recommended as an alternative form of assessment for different areas of language learning including vocabulary development, language skills, and subskills. The theoretical background of DA supports its applicability to classroom practices, based on the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky. The opportunity provided for the learners during the implementation of DA furthers cognitive, language, and developmental skills. The finding of this literature review emphasize the applicability of DA in language classrooms for vocabulary development from the point of view of sociocultural theory. Further research needs to explore the effectiveness of DA in the acquisition of different aspects of vocabulary such as vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation.

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