THE IMPACT OF INTERACTIONIST DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT ON ACADEMIC PERSUASIVE WRITING

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Abstract: This study investigated the effects of interactionist dynamic assessment on improving academic persuasive writing of two Iranian EFL learners majoring in English Language and Literature. Qualitative analysis of the interactions between the mediator and learners and the drafts written by the learners indicated that using different types of mediation were effective in developing learners' persuasive writing. In addition to the factors such as individual, time, and language feature which were shown to be integral in determining mediation, assessment of the two cases showed that factors such as mediator's role, learners' responsiveness to mediation, and agency were important in specifying mediation.

Keywords – **Dynamic Assessment; Iranian EFL Learners, Mediation, Persuasive Writing, Zone of Proximal Development**

INTRODUCTION

For Vygotsky, praxis which is rooted in the sociocultural theory (SCT) of mind is the integration of theory and practice. Based on Swain (2006), praxis and the SCT framework are promising environments for learning and this is the learners' agency that helps them to construct knowledge and improve learning. One of the important factors that learners employ in language learning in SCT is agency (Gao, 2010; Van lier, 2008). Agency is the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112); the learners' actions which are mediated by social, cultural, and contextual factors. The real

manifestation of praxis is in Vygotsky' concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Lantolf&Peohner, 2011, p.12) which is defined as the

> The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

ZPD is considered the focal point of development through which the learners' abilities and difficulties are revealed and an assistance adjusted to their ZPD is provided to guide their development; it is "a means of accessing and at the same time promoting the process of development" (Lantolf&Peohner, 2011). A framework which can be used for the ZPD understanding and realization of the concept of praxis is dynamic assessment (DA) (Lantolf&Peohner, 2011, 2014).DA is a "procedure that attempts to modify performance, via examiners' assistance, in an effort to understand learning potential" (Lussier&Swanso, 2005, as cited in Dorfler et al., 2009, p. 87).DA helps learners to improve their development through social and cultural mediation (Poehner, 2008).

Assessment, a part of learning, is reflective of theories and approaches used in learning (Katz, 2014). Traditional assessments are aloof from the concepts of intervention, teaching and learning (McNamara, 2001) and there is no relation between assessing and teaching (Moss, 2003). However, teachers need to be assessor of learners' needs, facilitator of language learning, and evaluators of their development (Rea-Dickins, 2004). Therefore, due to the inefficiency of traditional assessment to improve learners' abilities, DA was introduced which states that teaching and assessment should be integrated so that the learners' abilities can improve.DA and non-dynamic assessment (NDA) are different due to their conceptualization of the relationship between instruction and assessment. According to Rea-Dickins (2004), there are four relationships between assessment and instruction. The first relationship which is called washback effect refers to the effect of testing on teaching. The scores obtained based on this relationship are representative of the training that the learners received not their actual knowledge. The second approach to the relationship between assessment and instructions is curriculum-driven assessment in which the assessment develops based on the curriculum goals. Therefore, instruction and assessment are related to each other and originate from curriculum objectives.

In the third approach, we deal with parallel assessment and instruction in which assessment and instruction are developed together based on pedagogical goals. According to Pohner (2008), Task-based approach is an example of this approach because both instruction and assessment follow the communicative approach which stimulate real-life communicative interactions. The last connection between assessment and instruction is

instruction embedded assessment and aims at conducting assessment while giving instruction. This type of assessment is called formative assessment (FA) and aims at providing feedback about learner' strengths and weaknesses and tailoring instruction to the learners' needs. Instruction embedded assessment is a step toward integrating assessment and instruction; however, it is not the total integration since its purpose is to help the learners to accomplish tasks but not their development. "The total integration of assessment and instruction can only be achieved when learner development becomes the goal of all educational activities, and this is the major contribution of Dynamic Assessment" (Pohner, 2008, p. 12). In fact, "DA focus is not on learners per se but on mediation in the service of development; hence, transfer takes on special significance … and genuine assessment is not possible unless it is accompanied by instruction and vice versa" (Lantolf& Thorne, 2006, pp. 356-7). NDA approaches, on the other hand, "constitute a continuum that reflects the varying degrees to which feedback is included in the procedure, with static assessment representing one end and incidental formative assessment falling near the other end" (Poehner, 2008, p. 13).

According to Sternberg and Grigorenko (2002, as cited in Lantolf& Thorne, 2006), there are three basic differences between NDA and DA assessment. The First difference is that NDA deals with the already developed abilities and skills, while DA deals with learners' future development and focuses on helping learners to develop abilities which are not fully developed yet. The Second difference is that In NDA, the examiners are after reliable measurement and do not intervene in the assessment procedures. However, DA examiners intervene in the assessment procedure and increase learners' development through mediation. And the third difference is that in NDA, examinees do not receive feedback or assistance during assessment procedure, while examinees in DA receive mediation and assistance which help them to develop. DA "is not intended as a replacement for other types of testing but as a complement to them… [and its goal is] to measure, intervene, and modify behaviors and to document the process of learning" (Anton, 2009, pp.578-9). ZPD and mediation are two integral elements of DA which are the points of distinction between DA and NDA. Moreover, mediation is "a process that humans employ in order to regulate (i.e., gain voluntary control over and transform) the material world, others' or their own social and mental activity by using culturally constructed artifacts, concepts and activities" (Lantolf& Thorne, 2006, p. 79). The two concepts of ZPD and mediation set the ground for learners' development which is the ultimate goal of DA.

According to Lantolf and Poehner (2004), there are two types of DA, interventionist and interactionist DA. These two types of DA refer to the two types of mediation that examiners offer examinees. Interventionist DA attempts at quantifying the amount of help required for a learner to quickly reach an endpoint. It uses standardized procedures to produce quantitative results which can be compared and contrasted with other results. However, "interactionist DA follows Vygotsky's preference for cooperative dialoging. In this approach assistance emerges from the interaction between the mediator and the learner, and is therefore highly sensitive to the learners' ZPD" (Pohner, 2008, p. 18). InteractionistDA deals with the quality of the assistance and the development of an individual without concerning for endpoints. In interactionist DA, mediators try to do whatever they can to help the learners go beyond their current ability level and achieve their potentials. According to Poehner (2008)

> *Interventionist* DA is concerned with quantifying, as an index of speed of learning, the amount of help required for a learner to quickly and efficiently reach a prespecified endpoint. In contrast, *interactionist* DA focuses on the development of an individual learner or even a group of learners, regardless of the effort required and without concern for predetermined endpoints. (p. 18)

These two models of DA can be applied to improve different language skills and sub-skills through providing mediation and revealing leaners' ZPD. Second language writing skill plays an important role in the professional lives of experts in almost every field (Kroll, 2003). The development of good writing skills is important for both educational and non-educational reasons (Weigle, 2002).As Hyland (2003, p. xiii) states, "the ability to communicate ideas and information effectively through the global digital network is crucially dependent on good writing skills". Therefore, academic writing is so important in education and is considered a persuasive form of discourse (Hyland, 2005).

It is noticed that Iranian EFL learners have problems in writing persuasive essays and are not aware of the tools and strategies in order to improve their texts' persuasiveness. Due to the importance of second language writing, "writing as a communicative activity needs to be encouraged and nurtured during the language learners' course of study" (Olshtain, 2001, p. 207). In writing, there are for competences that we need, linguistics competence, getting the idea competence, and organizing the idea competence (Prastyo, 2014:104). Thus, this study tried to develop the academic persuasive writing of two advanced EFL learners through implementing interactionist DA. In this study, interactionist DA was used in order to fully understand the learners' potentials, needs, and weaknessessince "the standardization of mediation in interventionist DA reduces the

chance that the interaction will be sensitive to learner emergent needs" (Lantolf&Peohner, 2014, p. 187). Moreover, compared to the interventionist DA, interactionist DA is more process based (Haywood &Lidz, 2007).

DA which is grounded in the SCT of mind has an interactive nature which focuses on learning processes and assessment integrated with instruction which aims at modifying cognitive ability (Panahi, Birjandi, &Azabdaftari, 2013). Independent problem solving represents an individuals' mental ability partially; however, reaction to mediation reveals an individual future performance and is indicative of cognitive ability (Vygotsky, 1998). Lidz (1991) states that "to merely describe the child's performance does not allow us to draw conclusions or to derive recommendations" (p. 24). In other word, "To fully assess an individual's development, it is not enough to determine her or his intrapsychological ability, we must also uncover her or his interpsychological capacity" (Lantolf&Poehner, 2004, p. 51). Lidz (1987, p. 4) defines DA as "an interaction between an examiner-as-intervener and a learner-as-active participant, which seeks to estimate the degree of modifiability of the learner and the means by which positive changes in cognitive functioning can be induced and maintained".

Recently, researchers have paid considerable attention to DA studies in general education and specifically, language learning to explore the efficiency and feasibility of DA for second language pedagogy. For example, Gillam, Pena, and Miller (1999) tried to assess elementary level language learners' narrative and expository discourses through dynamically in order to investigate the students' ability in storytelling. The results showed that DA practices are valuable for revealing learners' potentials and problems in language learning. Moreover, DA procedures help mediators to plan DA frameworks and to provide the learners with appropriate mediation and interactions in order to produce valuable outcomes. They said that the mediators can work on strategies which help learners to become competent language users. They believed that DA "is yet to become a routine part of evaluations of children suspected of having speech and language disorders" (p. 46).

To investigate the feasibility of DA for improving verbal ability, Poehner's (2005) employed interactionist approach in seven sessions to mediate 6 advanced L2 French university students. At the beginning of the study, the students were asked to watch a video clip and narrate a story about it. They did it first independently and after that in an interaction between the mediator and the student, the mediator diagnosed their problems and offered mediation based on their needs and problems. To see whether DA was effective or not, the students were asked to watch the same clip and narrate it again both

independently and in an interaction with the mediator. The results revealed that interactionist DA was effective in improving the students' ability to narrate and speak.

In another study on speaking ability, Poehner (2007) investigated the role of transcendence in mediating learning experience. He examined the performances of students learning French as a second language in transcendence activities. The results indicated that identifying the sources of problems to assist the learners to develop their level of performance requires extensivemediation and the mediator needs to "continually alter both tasks and mediation in order to work successfully within a learner's ZPD because individuals' abilities and corresponding developmental needs are always emergent" (Poehner, 2007, p. 333). Moreover, Hill and Sabet (2009), investigated the effect of dynamic assessment on speaking. They provided mediation in the form of questions and prompts. Based on the findings, the learners could internalize the mediation they received and improved their performances.

Besides speaking, the use of DA is examined for French language listening comprehension skill by Ableeva (2008). During the intervention, the learners listened to an authentic announcement and received some mediation in the form of leading questions, hints, prompts and linguistic and cultural explanations based on their needs and problems. The researcher believed that the interactions between the mediator and learners reveal the problematic areas in the learners' performance. Therefore, interactions help mediators to provide the learners with appropriate mediationbased on their ZPD levels and help learners to develop their listening comprehension.

In order to use DA for instructing pragmatic issues, Tajeddin and Tayebipour (2012) investigated the immediate and delayed effects of DA on a group of Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of request and apology. The participants were divided into DA and NDA group, the former group received mediation on pragmatic points based on their needs while the latter group who received no feedback and were assessed based on their independent performance. All the learners were asked to complete discourse completion tests on request and apology speech acts. The results of the study revealed that "ZPD-oriented, DA-based interactive activities lead to better learning of L2 pragmatics on the part of EFL learners" (Tajeddin&Tayebipour, 2012, p. 113). Considering scaffolding as a significant feature of sociocultural-based feedback, Nassaji and Swain (2000) considered error correction as "a social activity involving joint participation and meaningful transactions between the learner and the teacher" (p. 35).

The application of DA for language studies has been researched recently (Lantolf&Poehner, 2004; Poehner&Lantolf, 2005; Poehner, 2005, 2007). However, the

study done by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) is considered"animportanttouchstone for more recent L2 DAresearch (Lantolf&poehner, 2014, p.170). Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) studied negotiation of feedback on written performance of nine ESL students and mediation based on the learners' ZPD levels in an ESL essay writing course. During an eight-week writing course, theparticipant were asked to write an essay every session and were provided with corrective feedback adjusted with the Vygotsky's ZPD on four grammatical features: articles, tense marking, uses of prepositions and modal verbs. Through interactions with the learners, the researcher evaluated their difficulties, abilities, and needs in order to give them appropriate assistance since they believed that "different learners often have different ZPDs for the same target language form and will therefore require different levels of help" (p. 473). They sated that effective assistance should have three features.The assistance should be graduated, contingent, and dialogic.

Based on the first feature, the assistance should beappropriate to the learners' ZPDs, help the learners to complete the tasks and develop to show their potential level of ability. The second feature says that it should be provided when the need arises and must be removed as soon as learners gain the ability to self-regulate and perform the tasks independently. And according to the third feature, providing the assistance is a dialogic activity in which the assistance will be offered through a collaborative interactions between instructors and learners.As stated inLantolf and poehner (2014, p.173), Aljaafreh and Lantolf, in their study, showed that "appropriate mediation varies along three planes of" individual, time and second language feature. Different individuals at different times require different types of mediation. Regarding language features, for micro level features such as grammar, the learners may require only implicit mediation; however, for macro and discourse-level features of language, they may need explicit and expanded mediation.

Considering DA, Xiaoxiao and Yan (2010) proposed a framework for teaching writing through conducting a case study research. Although it was based on DA, no assessment was performed and the researchers just scaffolded the participant with tools such as dialogues and reading texts while teaching writing skill. The framework they proposed for mediation consisted of three stages of (a) topic choice stage, (b) idea generation and structuring stage, and (c) macro revising stage. In each stage, first the learners receive a pre task, then mediation based on their needs, and then, a post task. They claimed that using this framework for teaching writing in a dialogic manner improve the learners' writing skill and engage them in the writing tasks by raising their enthusiasm.

To address DA for improving writing skill, through an interventionist DA, Alavi and Taghizadeh (2014) provided 32 male EFL university students with three types of

implicit and explicit feedback on the content, organization skills, and strategies of essay writing. Through interacting with the instructors and receiving different forms of mediation, the students could improve the skills and strategies used for writing. Although the students had different ZPD levels, DA was effective in their development and as they argued, "DA can contribute to the cognitive development of the learners and help them reach from other regulation to self-regulation" (p. 14).

Aghaebrahimian, Rahimirad, Ahmadi, KhalilpourAlamdari (2014) examined the effect of dynamic assessment on writing ability of advanced Iranian EFL students. Through a mixed method, they compared the participants in the experimental group who were assessed dynamically and the control group who were assessed through a traditional assessment approach. The essays of the two groups were rated by two raters. The results showed that the dynamic group outperformed the traditional group with regard to writing ability. Moreover, through questionnaires, the participants affirmed the positive effects of DA on their process of writing. The students in the experimental group stated that the assistance provided step-by- step opened new opportunities for them to pay attention to new issues related to teaching that they were not aware of.

Mahdavi (2014) investigated the impact of Mediated Leaning Experience on pre-intermediate students' writing ability. Through an experimental approach, the students were categorized into two main groups of control who learnt writing traditionally and an experimental group who received mediation while learning writing skill. Through 10 writing sessions, the weaknesses of the students in the experimental group were detected and were mediated. After the mediation, revising and rewriting practices were assigned to learners in order to help the learners practice the corrections and benefit from the mediation. The results revealed that both male and female learners in the experimental group outperformed the control group.

Davoudi and Ataie-Tabar (2015) addressed the implementation of a computerized dynamic test of writing (CDTW) for improving writing ability of 60 upper-intermediate Iranian EFL students. Moreover, through a questioner, the researchers examined the participants' attitudes towards a computerized dynamic assessment, the results of which showed the students' positive attitude towards this type of learning. Through an interventionist approach, the researchers used a computerized framework to provide pre-planned hints during three steps of pre-writing, writing, and revising. It was found that CDTW was proved efficient for students' writing development and affected the students with lower levels of ability more than students with higher writing ability. Moreover, the

researchers stated that this approach was effective in reducing their learners' learning anxiety and increasing the learners' confidence and motivation.

To add to the body of knowledge gained from the literature available on DA, this study attempted to examine experimentally the feasibility and efficacy of mediation in the form of interactionist DA on the EFL learners' academic persuasive writing. Interactionist DA provides mediation through the interaction between examiner and examinee and in this type of DA, hints or prompts are not preplanned; however, they emerge from the interaction and mediation. Thus, the purpose of this study was to develop the learners' academic persuasive writing. Moreover, this study tried to find the factors that determine the mediation that is provided for the learners through the interactions because the researcher believes that if the mediators know these factors, they can provide the learner with appropriate mediation.

This study holds importance in that through praxis (integrating teaching and assessment), it tries to improve EFL learners' academic persuasive writing by focusing on the learners' ZPD and the mediation that the leaners need to receive based on their ZPD. Yet it addressed written communication ability which is a paramount accomplishment for foreign and second language learners (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Moreover, the obtained results of the study can be highly informative for conducting argumentative writing practices since although argumentative genre is important for individuals' academic and non-academic success (Crowhurst, 1988; Ramos, 2014), there is a dearth of studies which have addressed it (Schneer, 2014). Yet, "no one kind of writing provides more opportunities for writing about real issues for real audiences than does argument" (Crowhurst, 1988, p. 35). What is more, every DA practice is valuable since it assesses the process of learning rather than the product through qualitative analysis of learners' writing performance and focus on the processes of learning in order to achieve the full actualization of individuals' potential capabilities. Furthermore, DA practices set the ground for learners' engagement in reflecting about their actions and planning their learning based on the mediation and interactions they have with their teachers. Moreover, this study tried to find the factors that specifies the mediation that learners receive, the results of which can be valuable for mediators while providing assistance and mediation for leaners.Furthermore, the results of the study will have implications for those interested in DA practices, specifically, language teachers of writing courses, those involved in language assessment, and even those in favor of persuasive writing genre.

Based on the foregoing points, the present study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Do interactionist DA procedures have any effect on the Iranian EFL learners' academic persuasive writing?

2. What are the factors that affect the mediation that the learners receive?

METHOD

This study used a qualitative design in which two Iranian EFL learners' performance and development on academic persuasive writing tasks were tracked.

Settings and Participants

The study was conducted at Shiraz University in 2015. The data were collected from two senior female students majoring in English Language and Literature who were Persian native speakers. The student had already passed a paragraph writing course in which they learnt different techniques of paragraph development such as description, explanation, example, anecdote, and cause and effect. The two participants volunteered to take part in DA sessions. The researcher used pseudonyms (Mary and Anne) for the participants while presenting the results of the study in order to keep the participants' confidentiality.

Materials

The researcher used two books as the source for teaching academic persuasive writing to the participants. One of them was Pocket keys for writers by Raimes (2013) and the other one was A complete guide to academic writing for EFL learners which was developed by Rahimi and Mehrpou (2010) as two associate professors at Shiraz University for the Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the researcher found some argumentative topics from the internet for writing sessions. The topics were:

1. Some people believe that film stars are not worth the money they are paid.

2. Being considered a beneficial source of information, the internet has some disadvantages and drawbacks.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

To find participants for the study, the researcher asked some of the senior students to take part in three writing sessions in order to learn persuasive genre of writing and help

conducting a research study. Two of the students volunteered to participate in the study. The researcher scheduled three writing sessions for the two cases to learn and practice introduction, body, and conclusion in argumentative essays in the first, second, and third sessions, respectively. The researcher tried to find some interesting debatable topics from the internet for writing sessions.In the first session of the treatment, the researcher gave the cases a topicand asked them to writean introduction about it. Then through interactions, the researcher provided the cases with mediation and helped them to revise their introductions and change them to argumentative ones. For further practice, the researcher gave two more topics and asked the participants to write introductions on the topics. In the second session, the participants were asked to develop the first introduction they had written in the previous session. During this session, the researcher taught the participants how to write the body section in argumentative essays through interactions with them. The third session was allocated to conclusion writing in argumentative genre. The participants reviewed the introduction and body they had written during the previous sessions and completed their essays by writing conclusions. Similar to the previous sessions, the researcher provided the participants with hints and tips to write conclusion in argumentative essays. The written drafts of the participants were collected for further analysis. Moreover, the interactions between the researcher and the two participants were recorded. The writings and the interactions were analyzed qualitatively and the results are presented in the following section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

In this section, some of the interactions between the researcher as the mediator and the learners produced during writing different sections of argumentative essays are presented. The first interaction was about the introduction and the thesis statements the participants wrote on the first topic mentioned in the Materials section.

Excerpt A:

Mediator   : OK, let's see what you have written. Mary, start.

Mary   **:** I believe film stars are not worth the enormous sums they are paid.

Mediator   : In argumentative essays, you should avoid personal feelings.

Mary   : You mean I should not say "I believe"?

Mediator : Yes. And Anne?

Anne **:** Film stars have become tycoons through the world.

Mediator : The same problem with your statement Anne, it is your personal feeling.

Anne : I do not think so…I did not say 'I believe' or 'in my opinion'.

Mediator : Right, but it seems that it is your opinion since you have no evidence for it, do you?

Anne : Uhum…No.So, you mean that we should not show our positions?

Mediator : No, in the introduction, you should introduce the topic and show that it is debatable and controversial, give your position but not personal ideas without support.

[After some seconds, Anne revised her introduction.]

A**nne** : May I read my new sentence?

Mediator : Sure.

Anne : Nowadays, film stars' way of life and the amount of money that they receive has become a controversial issue.

Mediator : Sounds good. You introduced the topic and its importance. Now write your thesis statement in which you need to show opposing views. And you Mary?

Mary : Well…I do not know…

Mediator : no problem. Let's do it. Instead of saying "I", refer to other people.

Mary : for example some of my friend…

Mediator : Yeah good. Now you can compare being an actor with other jobs.

[Mary thought for a moment]

Mary : ok. Some of my friends believe that actors are very popular and should earn more money than people in other jobs.

Mediator : Well, now present the opposite view to show that it is controversial.

[Mary thought for some seconds]

Mary : Some of my friends believe that actors are very popular and should earn more money than people in other jobs, while others believe that it is unfair.

Mediator : very good, but before this statement introduce the topic first, like what Anne wrote as the introduction.

[Mary thought for some seconds]

Mary : Whether film stars are worth the money they receive or not is an important subject of debate.

Mediator : Well done.

Excerpt B:

Mary : Although some believe that film stars are not worth these amount of money….

Mediator : What?

Mary : Oh oh sorry…this amount.

Excerpt C:

Anne : Movie stars are cultural representative of their society.

Mediator : What?

Anne : I mean they show the culture.

Mediator : No…not the meaning.

Anne : Then what?

Mediator : Agreement between subject and verb components.

Anne : Ok for 'movie stars' have used 'are'….

Mediator : Verb components… representative…

Anne : Oh yeah…representatives.

The following excerpt was a part of the interaction that happened during the second session in which the focus was on the body section of argumentative essays.

Excerpt D:

Mediator : Mary! Your views (arguments) and opposing views (counter arguments) are mixed!

Mary : Well…first, I said a counterargument and then, an argument against it.

Mediator : Do not you think that the two sides' positions and claims should be stated clearly?

Mary : Should not we mix the two?

Mediator : What is your idea?

Anne : I think we should separate arguments and counterarguments.

Mediator : Good, and how can we present them?

Anne : May be in two different paragraphs.

Mary : You mean a paragraph for arguments and another for counterarguments?

Anne : Yes. Am I right?

Mediator : Yes good. And which one should we state first? Arguments or counterarguments?

Mary : Counterarguments.

Anne : Yeah counterarguments.

Mediator : Why?

Mary : Because after that, we show that the other sides' views or ideas are not correct.

Anne : And then give our claims and arguments.

Mediator : Excellent. In a paragraph, give counterarguments and refute them. Then, in another paragraph, give your claims and arguments and support them with strong evidences.

Interaction D which is presented below was one of the interactions that happened in the third session in which the learners learnt and practiced the conclusion section of argumentative essays.

The following excerpt was a part of the interaction happened during conclusion writing.

Excerpt E:

Mediator : New ideas in the conclusion!

Anne : Sorry?

Mediator : Do we add new ideas in the conclusion?

Anne : Well…no. I learnt it in our paragraph writing course, but I forgot it.

Mediator : Mary you have copied the thesis statement in the conclusion!

Mary : Yeah to show my position.

Mediator : Ok you need to restate it.

Mary : Should I change it?

Mediator : No not changing. Keep the idea and restate it.

Mary : OK.

Mediator : Anne, why did you mention both arguments and counterarguments in the conclusion?

Anne : Because in the conclusion we should summarize what we have written.

Mediator : Right. But what is the purpose of an argumentative essay?

Anne :Well… [Thinking]…to convince others.

Mediator : Good. Now for convincing others what should you do?

Anne : Give claims.

Mary : And strong evidences.

Mediator : Very good. In the conclusion, as the last part of your essay, you want to convince others with your ideas.

Anne : You mean we should just give arguments?

Mary : I think, we should write some of our key ideas.

Mediator : Right. Recount your main arguments, then restate your thesis statement and finally, end with an emphatic sentence.

Discussions

As it was mentioned in the literature, based on Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), mediation varies across language features and individuals. The interaction above confirmed their idea and showed how different learners responded in different ways to the mediation. By receiving some tips from the mediator, Anne could revise her introduction, while Mary needed more assistance to write her thesis statement and introduction. Moreover, Anne took initiatives more than Mary and challenged the mediator by asking questions and defending what she had written. The learners who are more responsive and take more initiatives during interactions may need less help and may perform independently.Furthermore, since the participants were learning discourse-level and generic structures, the mediator had to provide explicit mediation to the learners because the learners did not know the argumentative genre. However, for correcting micro-level aspects of language such as grammar, the learners may need implicit mediation or a range of implicit to explicit assistance. Comparing this interaction with the following excerpts (B and C), we can see that for correcting grammatical mistakes, implicit or a mixture of implicit and explicit types of feedback are used, while, for teaching features of discourse (interaction A), explicit mediation is employed.

Comparison of interactions B and C showed that the two learners' responses to the same form of mediation was different. The mediator used clarification request for both learners, but their responsiveness to the mediation was different. Mary could easily notice her mistake and correct it, while Anne needed more assistance. While mediating Anne's performance, the mediator, first used clarification request, then metalinguistic feedback, and finally, directed the learner's attention to the word which was problematic. However, the mediator did not provided the learners with correct answer and tried to elicit the correct form and made the learner correct herself. Therefore, in addition to the three factors proposed byAljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) that specifies mediation, we can refer to the mediator as another factor (different mediators may have different abilities to use different forms of mediation and direct the learners to recover and improve their performance). Yet, another factor which determines the mediation is the learners' responsiveness to previous mediation that they received.As it is shown in this excerpt, Mary was responsive to the first mediation and could correct herself. However, the mediator tried both implicit and explicit types of mediation to help Anne since she did not respond correctly to clarification request and metalinguistic feedback.

Regarding the time factor in specifying the amount and type of mediation, the learners' needs in interactions B and C can be compared with their need for assistance in

the first excerpt. In interaction A, Mary was highly dependent on the mediator's assistance and received explicit mediation, while, in interaction B, through an implicit feedback that she received she could recover her sentence. On the contrary, Anne could not adjust her grammaticalerror easily and needed extended assistance in interaction C; however, in interaction A, she revised her sentence easily by receiving just some minute hints.

Comparing the learners' performance in interactions D and E with their performance in interactions A, B, and C, in the second and third sessions, the learners became more active during the interaction. As it is indicated in these excerpts, instead of relying on the mediator to give them hints and add something to their previous knowledge, the learners took initiatives to ask questions, give comments, and answer the questions posed by the mediator. Both of the learners contributed to the discussion to make a joint understanding of argumentative genre of writing. Thus, one more factor which specifies the meditation can be agency; exercising different levels of agency needs different mediation. Yet, the mediator's role was very effective in helping the leaners to exercise their agency and take initiatives. Instead of directly giving instructions, the mediator posed some questions and elicited the learners' responses in order to engage them in knowledge construction. Thus, the mediator's role affected the mediation that the learners received and can be considered a factor that determines the mediation the leaners receive.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

Due to the importance of second language writing for effective communication and the value of argumentative genre as an academic genre, this study employed an interactionist DA framework for improving two EFL learners' academic persuasive writing. The interactions and the drafts that the participants wrote during DA sessions showed that the mediations and interactions were effective in developing the participants' persuasive writing. The results of the study were in agreement with other studies which showed the effectiveness of DA practices for improving different language skills (Ableeva, 2008; Alavi&Taghizadeh, 2014; Aljaafreh&Lantolf, 1994; Davoudi&Ataie-Tabar, 2015; Gillam, Pena, & Miller, 1999; Hill &Sabet, 2009; Lantolf&Poehner, 2004; Mahdavi, 2014; Nassaji& Swain, 2000; Poehner, 2005, 2007; Poehner&Lantolf, 2005; Tajeddin&Tayebipour, 2012; Xiaoxiao& Yan, 2010). Analysis of theinteractions showed that the mediator could help the learners learn persuasive genre of writing and overcome their problems. Furthermore, the results showed that the mediation helped the leaners to actively take part in interactions and revise their texts and give comments on each other's

writings. One of the advantages of the interactionist type of mediation was that the learners could be actively involved in the process of learning and they gave comments on each other's' performance. Yet, the mediation that the learners received was completely matched with their needs and wants.

In addition to the three factors that Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) mentioned for determining mediation, the interactions in this study revealed three more factors that regulate the mediation that the learners received. These factors were the mediator's role, learners' responsiveness to mediation, and agency. However, there may be other factors that specify the amount and type of mediation which can be revealed through other studies using interventionist or interactionist DA frameworks. The results of this study can be informative for language teachers and those in favor of improving writing skill.Yet, the results have implications for material developers since there are few language learningsources designed based on DA framework.The concepts of mediation, continuous assessment and internalization should be taken into account for designing materials in line with dynamic systems. Nonetheless, the results of this study cannot be generalized since the number of participants, their proficiency levels, and thenumber of DA sessions need reconsiderations; only two female senior students majoring in English participated in three DA sessions. Although this was a small-scale study, it can increase the teachers' awareness that many different factors are involved in learning. So, through action research or large-scale studies, others can find as many as factors affecting DA practices in order to be aware of them and benefit from them to facilitate learning and development. Thus, this study suggests other teachers and researchers to study different contexts and provide the readers with a possible list of factors that affect mediation in order to increase their consciousness regarding different factors.Moreover, further studies will be required to implement interactionist approach in large-scale assessment to see how interactionist DA affect other cases. Yet, other researchers can integrate DA practices for writing with technological advancements to see how they can mediate learners online and through software.

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