

## The Role of Dynamic Assessment in EFL Writing Class

**Lutfi Ashar Mauludin, Triubaida Maya Ardianti**  
Faculty of Vocational Studies, Universitas Airlangga  
lutfi.ashar@vokasi.unair.ac.id

### Abstract

Several studies in some countries have mentioned the effectiveness of Dynamic Assessment (DA) in improving the students' writing skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This study investigates the role of DA in improving students' writing skill in Indonesian setting. The study used a quasi-experimental method in a public university in Indonesia. The participants were 30 English Diploma Students in their second year. The students were divided into control and experimental group. The experimental group received the treatment using DA approach, meanwhile the control received traditional method. The data were gathered through pretest and posttest. The data then were tabulated using SPSS. The descriptive analysis was conducted to find out its significance. The result shows that DA has significant role in improving the students' writing skill.

**Keywords:** Dynamic Assessment, Writing Skills, EFL

### A. INTRODUCTION

Assessment is a variety of techniques or processes that consist of testing and measurements. The function of assessment is to find out systematic information about individual or students based on the testing procedures (Alemi, 2015). The main purpose is to support the process of teaching and learning. The result of assessment is considered to be important data that can influence the students' future.

However, recently, assessment is viewed as a tool that bring anxiety and nervousness to the students. The reason is because the result of assessment is considered to be high stake (Poehner, 2008). In this case, the students' life depends on the result of assessment. Some countries apply national examination that requires the students to achieve several standard scores to pass. This actually does not align with the fundamental purpose of assessment which aims to help the students acquire the knowledge.

In the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), assessment plays significant role since it determines the students' achievement in certain level of language mastery. Assessment is expected to support the students' achievement. Nevertheless, the current assessment mostly does not encourage the students' skill development since most of

them focus on the results instead of the process. Therefore, an alternative assessment is needed to fill the gap.

Dynamic Assessment (DA) has been considered to be one of the most popular alternatives assessment in the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The main purpose of DA is to mediate and to give guidance to the students during the process of testing or measurement. In other word, DA is a kind of assessment that the main function is to help the students improving their skills. DA has been considered to be an appropriate alternative since, in this assessment, the focuses is in the relation between testing and instruction. In this case, the assessment is a part of teaching and learning activity, and its main role is to solve the occurring problems in the classroom.

In EFL class, the students need to be able to master the four skills of language; speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The last skill, writing, is considered to be one of the most difficult skill since it encompasses many interrelated abilities to function in a communication. To master writing, the students need proper guidance and instruction so that they can achieve the expected goal. In the context of assessment, writing assessment is expected to support the development of the students' mastery that combines the theory and principles during the assessment practices.

DA suggests a different way of thinking about a testing or assessment form any other traditional assessments since it encompasses the integration of pedagogical approach of assessment, understanding learners' abilities, instruction, and supporting learner development (Poehner, 2008). Those elements are important factors in supporting the students' mastery skill in writing class. Therefore, this study tries to find out the role of DA in the process of teaching writing in EFL context.

## **B. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Basic theory of Dynamic Assessment**

The root of DA is based on the Vygotsky's notion of Zone Proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD theory mentions that the problems in the process of teaching and learning that is faced by the students can be solved by giving them guidance or assistance (Kozulin, A., Gindis, B., Ageyev, V., Miller, 2003). In other words, the students need the teachers' assistance or peer assistance in solving the problem before they can solve the problem independently. This means the assistances should be beyond what students can do independently (Davin & Donato, 2013). The guidance or support should be within the students' scope of development; therefore, it can

be assumed that the students will not be able to solve the problem if there is no guidance. This situation creates a situation when the assistance is needed. The process of assisting is actually one of the stages of development that the students should face in solving the problem. If the guidance is unnecessary, the development of potential does not occur.

According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT), DA is defined as the instruction and assessment that should be conducted inseparably (Hashemnezhad & Fatollahzadeh, 2015). This means if the teachers have tendency to see how the students develop their skill or to witness how they make a progress in a classroom, their assessment should not focus on the final achievement. Instead, the focus of assessment should be on their achievement process in the classroom with the help of the teachers or their peers since what the students master or achieve in the classroom with the help of others will reflect their potential development of achievement independently. The process of teachers or peers' guidance during the learning process reflects the internalization process which shows that the students will be able to solve independently in the near future. In other words, what the teachers should do in the classroom is actually to give guidance to the students with some instruction, and decide their potential development based on the results (Lantolf & Poehner, 2010).

Furthermore, Vygotsky also suggests that human cognition and learning is considered to be social and cultural instead of individual (P. Shrestha & Coffin, 2012). Particularly, ZPD theory emphasizes on the notion that it is important to know what the students can do in the future based on the process of what they can do in the present. DA is grounded in the concept that assessment is considered to be a process rather than a product. Thus, the process-oriented assessment is expected to show the students' current skills in order to help them to solve any performance obstacles to realize their potential.

Similar with ZPD theory, assistance, guidance, or mediation is an important part in DA. Mediation, or instruction, here, refers to a process that the students engage in order to obtain the objective of the study (P. Shrestha & Coffin, 2012). In other words, mediation is the intentional interaction between the instructor and the students in solving or overcoming the problems. The focus is the mediation becomes a developmental support from the instructors or teachers to the students. Therefore, in DA, the mediation allows the teachers to collaborate with the students to overcome the assessment task.

DA defies the traditional method of teaching by arguing that the process of teaching and testing should not be viewed as separate activities but joint activities (Poehner, 2008). The integration appears since the mediation is integrated within the testing procedure to interpret

the students' ability. There are two kinds of mediation in DA (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). They are sandwich format and cake format. In sandwich format, there are three stages administered. The first is pretest, the second is mediation, and the third is posttest. In this method, the mediation is sandwiched between pretest and posttest. The result of posttest can be compared to the pretest so that the improvement or the development of the students can be assessed. The mediation can be given either individually or in groups.

In cake format, however, the mediation is given during the testing process when the problem occurs (Poehner, 2008). In this process, the hint, or leading questions are given during the administration of the test. When the students find difficulties, the instructors will give some feedback in form of pre-fabricated hints. The hints will be given overtime until the students find the correct answer or give up (Hessamy & Ghaderi, 2014).

### **Dynamic Assessment versus non-Dynamic Assessment**

Fundamentally, there are two kinds of assessment method; summative and formative. Summative assessment (SA) refers to kinds of assessment that is administered at the end of teaching and learning process. Meanwhile, formative assessment (FA) refers to kinds of assessment that is administered during the teaching and learning process. SA is focused on the product of learning. The result of the learning reflects the students' development skill. On the other hand, FA is conducted in the middle of learning process or before the completion of a learning process. The aims to find out how much the students have achieved during the learning process. FA provides feedback or suggestions for the students so they can overcome their weakness.

The big difference between DA and those two kinds of assessment is in the process of test administration which DA integrated the process of giving instruction and mediation (Hessamy & Ghaderi, 2014). Meanwhile, FA and SA forbid giving any assistance or hints for the students who have a test. Therefore, DA is focused on the anticipated ability or future performance meanwhile FA and SA are focused on the product of the past. In this case, DA is considered to be more relevant to develop the students' skill since it investigates the students' potential during the learning.

Furthermore, DA methods is considered to be a flexible approach between teachers and students interaction (Poehner, 2008). In non-dynamic assessments (NDA), although the feedback given or included in the procedure, but the focus of feedback is in the result of the test. However, DA methods pay attention to not only result but also emphasize the feedback

during the problem solving. Dynamic conversation and consultation occur in DA since the students have direct interaction with the teachers. The mediation is flexible, and it does not have the fixed requirements. The most important thing is the mediation covers the view of students' ability during the instructions, the aims of administering the test, and the role of instructors.

The general differences between DA and NDA can be concluded into three main elements (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). Firstly, in the assessment goals, the NDA focuses on the skills that have been acquired, or past abilities, or the product of the learning. Meanwhile, DA considers that product-oriented approach does not fit with the assessment process. The conclusion based on the preexisting skills is rejected, and the goal of assessment is to find an information of the students' ability and potential to grow. Secondly, in terms of feedback, DA administers the constructive feedback during the assessment procedures. The feedback is given as mediation. NDA prohibits any mediations or interactions during the testing process. Finally, DA views students who take the test as active participants and the teachers as a mediator who try to motivate and maintain the positive vibe of the students' cognitive functions. On the other hand, NDA does not involve any instructors or mediators during the assessment.

### **Approaches in Dynamic Assessments**

In general, there are two kinds of approaches in DA; interventionist and interactionist (Poehner, 2008). The interventionist approach applies mediation method by using standardized administration procedures and create a form of guidance to generate results that can be used to assess or measure the students' performance for future test. In other words, interventionist DA emphasizes quantifying or speed learning. This approach focuses on the amount of guidance needed by the students to achieve the goal quickly and efficiently. On different note, interventionist attempts to provide valid and reliable evidence of students' development by quantifying their performance (Sadek, 2015).

On the other hand, the interactionist DA focuses on the interactions between the teachers and the students (Poehner, 2008). This means it emphasizes the term cooperation to explain the teachers as mediator and students as test-takers relationship. The guidance occurs in the process of interaction between the mediator and the test-takers. This approach is highly related to the theory of ZPD. Moreover, the interactionist is more interested in the process of interaction that takes place between the mediator and the test-takers (Sadek, 2015). So, it less focuses on the quantifying the ability of students' development.

## Studies on Dynamic Assessments

Several studies have been conducted to find out the role of dynamic assessment in some EFL settings. Xiaoxiao & Yan (2010) studies the DA to find out its relationship between methodology and epistemology. The study focuses on the framework or process of writing instruction of English that adapt the principles of DA. This case study shows that the dialogic way of teaching in DA have significant role in improving the students' writing interest as well as their competence. They mentioned that the study did not only provide insights in education practice, but also creativity in the English writing instruction.

In Shrestha & Coffin's (2012) study, the mediation in form of tutoring for undergraduate business students were conducted. The mediation was about the academic writing development in open and distance learning by implementing DA approach. The mediation was conducted through email. The results show that the mediation contribute positively to their academic writing development.

Alemi (2015) conducted a study by investigating the Iranian EFL learners' self-assessment and self-rating to their writing ability as well as the effect of DA in their accuracy. He also investigated the interrelationship among the teacher rating, self-assessment, and self-rating in the writing performance. The participants were twenty-two engineering students who take a writing course as part of general English course. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, and t-test. The results showed that DA successfully help Iranian EFL learners to find a better awareness of the characteristics of writing evaluation. Therefore, they became more accurate in measuring their own writing ability.

Then, Sadek (2015) reported the qualitative study on the impact of DA on the writing of ESL learners. There were six participants in the study. The study was conducted by administering the pretest, posttest, interviews, and observations. The result shows that DA has positive impact on the content, language, and the organization of the ESL learners' writing. It is also reported that the students and teachers have positive evaluation since it allows the students to focus on their individual weakness. The study concluded that the DA model in ESL writing is effective to overcome the problems related to the students' learning development.

Hashemnezhad & Fatollahzadeh (2015) investigates fifty Iranian students in a quasi-experimental study to find out the immediate and delayed effects of their writing performance. Pretest was conducted by assigning the students to write two topics in both experimental and control group. In experimental group, the DA technique was applied, meanwhile in control

group, the traditional method was administered. The posttest was given afterwards. The study concluded that DA is an effective teaching tool to enhance the students' writing performance. It is proved to have immediate effects. Five weeks later, the second post-test was conducted. The result shows that DA did not only prove to have immediate effects, it also has delayed effects.

Finally, Miao & Lv (2013) performed the study of DA in constructing writing frameworks. By integrating the sandwich cake stages (pre-writing – mediation – post-writing), the study investigates the implementation of writing process framework into the dialogue-centered ESL writing classroom. The comparative study shows that the writing scores and writing product from the framework has advantage in the development of ESL writing skills.

Based on the previous studies, it is evident that DA has positive influence in the development of writing skills of EFL learners. The current study will investigate the use of DA in Indonesian context to find out what is the role of DA in the students' writing skills development.

## C. METHOD

### Participants

The participants of the study were 30 students of English Diploma Program in one of the Public University in Indonesia. The students were in the second year of the study. They had mastered basic and lower intermediate level of writing. The students were divided into two groups; control group and experimental group.

### Instrumentations

The data were gathered through pretest and posttest. A pre-test was administered to both experimental group and control to determine the participants' writing performance abilities before the experiment. The pre-test included one writing topic. The pre-test conducted in a non-dynamic way, i.e. in the traditional or usual way, with which all of the participants were familiar.

After the pre-test, the treatment began and last for three sessions. In each session, the researcher as a teacher introduced a topic for writing, and gives feedback. After 3 sessions of treatment, the teacher administered a post-test to the participants. Similar with the pre-test, the post-test included one writing topic.

## Research procedure

The study was conducted for four weeks. The students were divided into two groups namely, control group and experimental group (15 students in each group). In the first week, both group were assigned to write a summary based on a text about library. In this activity, each individual was given a text. They were given the instruction to write a summary of the text. Their summary writings were then calculated as pretest data.

In the second week, the students in control group were taught summary writing skill using traditional method. Traditional method here means that the teacher only gave them explanation about how to write a summary. Then, they were given a test about summarization. They needed to summarize a text. During the process of summarizing, there was no interaction or mediation between the teacher and the students.

Meanwhile, in the experimental group, the DA was used following the pre-test. The DA format that was used is sandwich format. In this format, the mediation was given after the pre-test and before the posttest. After the explanation of how to summarize a text, the students were given a test to check their understanding. During the test, the students were given the mediation including hints, explanation, prompts, suggestions, and leading questions. In this test, the teacher looked around and observed each student to find their progress. Once the teacher found a student had difficulty in summarizing the text, the teacher gave some hints and explanation how to solve the problem. In some cases, the teacher found the students incorrectly wrote the summary, so the teacher immediately gave some corrections and suggestions how to correct the errors. In the end of the meeting, the teachers asked the students to gather in groups and discuss the difficulties they found. Those difficulties were evaluated to improve their next writing.

In the third week, the students were given another text to summarize. In control group, the method was the same with the previous week. The teacher gave them the tests and there was no intervention from the teachers. In experimental group, however, the mediation was conducted. Slightly different with the previous week, in this week, the teacher required the students to ask questions individually once they found difficulties. In the previous meeting, the teacher only observed the students by himself and tried to find the errors or mistakes that the students make. In this meeting, the teacher did not only observe the students but let them to ask some questions regarding the summarization. The hints, suggestions, leading questions, and prompts were given by the teacher to different students. In the fourth week, posttest was administered for both group.

The results of pretest and posttest were evaluated using ESL Composition Profile to avoid any subjectivity. Two independent raters evaluated each result. The collected data were then analyzed using SPSS.

### Data analysis

The results of pretest and posttest were scored using ESL Composition Profile. The results were then used as data to be analyzed using SPSS. The paired-samples T-test was conducted to find out the effectiveness of DA in the writing class.

## D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data were analyzed using SPSS. Table 1 shows the results of the paired-sample statistic of control group and experimental group.

Table 1. Paired-samples Statistic

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control	Posttest	74,8333	15	9,12545	2,35618
	Pretest	68,2667	15	5,52225	1,42584
Experiment	Posttest	85,8000	15	5,88218	1,51877
	Pretest	73,2667	15	7,07578	1,82696

Based on the table, it is shown that in control group the mean score of pretest is 68,2, meanwhile the mean score of pretest in experimental group is 73,2. From this result, it can be seen that both group has quite significant difference. Based on the posttest, mean score of control group is 74,8 while experimental group is 85,8. Looking at the difference between pretest and posttest in control group, there is a significant improvement from 68,2 to 74,8. Experimental group also shows significant difference between the pretest and posttest from 73,2 to 85,8.

To find out the significance improvement of control group and experimental group, paired-samples t-test was implemented. Table 2 shows the results of paired-sample t-test of control and experimental group.

Table 2. Paired-Samples T-test

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Control	6,56667	7,24782	1,87138	3,509	,003
Experiment	12,53333	4,49391	1,16032	10,802	,000

The result shows that there is significant improvement in control group with the significance score 0,003 ( $p < 0,05$ ). Meanwhile, in the experimental group, the significance score is 0,000 ( $p < 0,05$ ). This result shows that the improvement of experimental group is more significant than the control group. Thus, it can be said that the treatment in experimental group which is the implementation of Dynamic Assessment is more effective than the treatment in control group.

This result is aligned with the previous studies that prove the effectiveness of Dynamic Assessment in improving the students' writing skills. This effectiveness is based on the useful mediation and intervention of Dynamic Assessment approach in the teaching and learning process. Dynamic Assessment helps the students to understand better about the materials since during the administration of the test, the students are given chance to clarify what they have understood and what they have not. By consulting this problem, the students can find the solution directly and accurately.

DA is focused on the development of learning process and it helps to identify the students' growing skills (Shrestha, 2017). This identification is shown during the mediation process when the instructions giving hints or clues during the testing in the second and the third week. This process helps the teachers to analyze the level of students' understanding by calculating how many hints that the students need. The less hints, the better students' current ability. Thus, the teacher can help each individual effectively since each student has different level of understanding.

Furthermore, DA helps each student to analyze their own strengths in writing process. EFL writing is considered to be challenging since it includes the process of finding idea in the first language, and then, they have to transfer it into the target language. Since the target language has different structure and vocabulary, their accuracy in the target language is lacked. Thus, the mediation given by the teachers encourages the students to find out their weakness and their lack of writing knowledge. By recognizing their ability, the necessary treatment to improve their ability can be effectively given. Furthermore, this self-rating also give the

students' opportunity become independent in developing their own skills (Alemi, 2015).

Finally, the application of DA helps students to reduce their anxiety. The students often feel nervous and anxious during the assessment process. The DA approach suggests the teachers to motivate each student by intervening their assessment process. This activity encourages students to feel relaxed since they can get guidance once they have problem during the testing process. Some of the students might feel reluctant to tell their problems, however, applying the mediation process, the teachers actively interact with the students so it makes them easier to convey their problems.

## E. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that at least there are three beneficial elements from the implementation of DA to improve students' writing skills. Firstly, DA helps teachers to gather the information about the students' understanding about the process of writing skills. By interacting with the students, the teachers can understand the level of the students' ability. Secondly, DA helps students to assess their own ability or to conduct a self-rating about writing process. The direct interaction with the teacher provides some beneficial feedback for the students to improve their skills. Last but not least, DA helps students to reduce their anxiety since DA is more focused on helping the students to solve the problem during writing process. Therefore, it can be concluded that DA has significant role in improving the students' ability.

However, it also should be noticed that the students' success in the classroom is affected by many factors. Therefore, further studies need to be conducted by including many other variables to find out the other roles of DA in improving the students' writing ability.

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