



# Dynamic Assessment (DA): Promoting Writing Proficiency through Assessment

Nihal Sadek

*Educational Testing Service (ETS),  
Princeton, NJ, USA*

*Received 10<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2015, Revised 9<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2015, Accepted 14<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2015, Published 1<sup>st</sup> Dec. 2015*

**Abstract:** This paper reports on a qualitative study conducted to explore the impact of a proposed Dynamic Assessment (DA) model on the writing of six ESL learners. The model is rooted in Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The research questions posed by the study included: (1) how is the proposed Hybrid Dynamic Assessment (HDA) model applied?, (2) what is the impact of the HDA model on the writing of the six ELL?, and (3) how do participants evaluate the HDA model? Using pre-and post- tests, interviews and observations, it was found that a number of mediation strategies were used during the application of the HDA model, mediators and students performed different roles during the application of the model, and that the HDA model had a positive impact on the content, language, and organization of the six ESL learners' writing. Finally, participants reported their positive evaluation of the HDA model.

**Keywords:** Dynamic Assessment-Vygotsky-ESL writin

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent research in the field of second language learning theories is increasingly emphasizing the role of interaction in promoting second language learning; yet, current assessment practices implemented in different ESL classrooms have not caught up with what such learning theories are advocating. Many researchers have advocated assessment procedures that are ongoing and process-oriented. For example, Stiggins (2005) calls for the use of *assessment for learning* models that focus on ongoing formative assessment rather than the widely used *assessment of learning* models which are more static in nature.

Despite this current effort to promote ongoing assessment methods, it seems that there is still some resistance to the use of such assessment models in second language learning mainly because clear procedures by which such assessment models can be practically applied in the language classroom are still lacking. One area of research that has recently emerged to capture the essence of ongoing assessment methods is that of Dynamic Assessment (DA).

## 2. DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT

The advent of DA is relatively new in the field of educational assessment in general and in the field of second language assessment in particular (Ableeva 2009). Tzuril (2001) states that there has recently been a proliferation of interest in DA due to the current dissatisfaction with static standardized testing procedures. In their definition of DA, Lantolf and Poehner (2004) state that "in essence, DA is a procedure for simultaneously assessing and promoting development that takes account of the individual's (or group's) zone of proximal development" (50). In other words, Lantolf and Poehner define DA in terms of one's zone of proximal development, a major concept in Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT). This definition also reveals that DA aims at promoting examinees' development rather than measuring their performance at a specific point of time.

## 3. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT

Over the last two decades, Vygotsky's (1978) work has received a lot of attention due to its introduction of the social nature of learning. One of Vygotsky's most important concepts is the ZPD "which was developed originally to address the problems of measurement of

mental age and the prediction of future learning and development” (Tzuril 2001: 12). In other words, assessment has always been of utmost importance in Vygotsky’s work which is rather ironic given that the concept has not yet been fully utilized within the field of assessment. According to Vygotsky, the ZPD can be defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978: 86).

#### 4. MODELS OF DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT

There are two main models of DA: interventionist and interactionist models. Interventionist models are quite similar to current standardized tests in that they focus on measurement (Lantolf & Thorne, 2004). Interventionist models usually follow a pre-test-mediation-post-test format. On the other hand, interactionist approaches are more interested in the interaction that takes place between the mediator and the learner, and are therefore less concerned with quantifying ability than they are with promoting student development.

Language tests have recently been more interested in assessing the social aspects of language including pragmatics and communicative competence while neglecting the social dimension of the assessment procedure itself and its impact on second language learning. Interactionist DA models, on the other hand, with their emphasis on the role of the examiner-examinee interactions in promoting second language learning could be seen to fill that gap.

On a different note, it seems that DA models are categorized as either interventionist or interactionist, but not both. Nevertheless, a closer examination of each model reveals that each model has both its strengths and weaknesses. For example, interventionist DA models focus on quantifying student performance at the expense of qualitative information about student performance in an attempt to provide valid and reliable evidence. Meanwhile interactionist models alone fail to provide “baseline measures or a standard assessment protocol” (Minick 1987: 118) which are considered a necessity if DA is to be applied in different educational settings. Thus, a model that builds on the strengths of both interventionist and interactionist DA models, rather than focusing on one and excluding the other, can prove beneficial.

In an attempt to achieve that end, this study aims at introducing a Hybrid Dynamic Assessment (HDA) model to be used within an ESL context and exploring its impact on students’ writing. This HDA model integrates aspects of both interactionist and interventionist DA

models. Figure 1 illustrates the main characteristics of such a model.

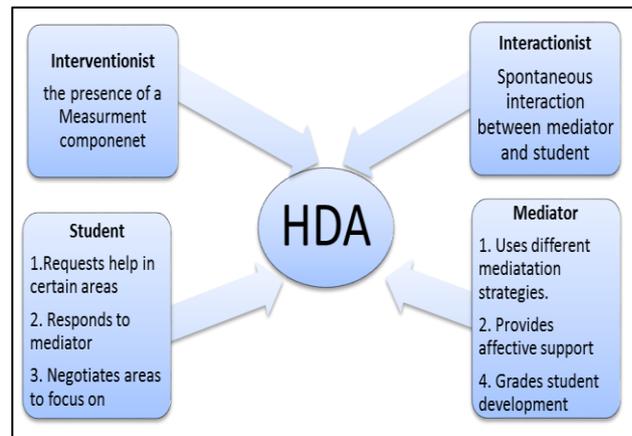


Figure 1. Characteristics of the Proposed HDA Model

As seen in Figure 1, the main interventionist aspect of the proposed HDA model is the presence of a measurement component manifested in grading student development. For the purposes of this study, a specially designed writing development rubric was used in order to assess students’ writing development over the different papers (see Appendix A). The rubric was designed to include two sections: in section one, the mediator and student negotiate which writing area(s) to focus on during the session whereas in section two the mediator grades the writing areas previously mediated. It is worth noting that section one of the rubrics included an entry where the mediator noted at least one area of strength in the paper to be discussed with the student during the mediation session. The reason behind including a section on strengths is to motivate students during the different mediation sessions and raise their self-esteem. The areas evaluated using this writing development rubric were those covered during the student-mediator interactions which reflected the expectations of the writing course covered by the participants of the study. More information about the participants and the course is covered in the sample section below.

#### 5. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The purpose of this multiple-case study is to explore the impact of a Hybrid Dynamic Assessment (HDA) model on the writing of six ESL graduate students. The researcher believes that an understanding of the proposed model would provide educators in general and ESL/EFL educators in particular with an alternative writing assessment method. This proposed assessment method can be used to assess second language writing in order to overcome many of the problems associated with the currently used standardized writing assessment methods



which mainly focus on quantifying performance rather than promoting writing development.

In seeking to explore the impact of an HDA model on the writing of ELL, the study addresses three main research questions which are: (a) How is the HDA applied?, (b) What is the impact of applying a HDA model on the development of six ELL' essay writing defined in terms of content, language and organization?, and (c) How do ELL and teachers evaluate the proposed HDA model as a means to assess their writing?

To answer the above research questions, information about a number of related issues was needed. This information can be summarized in the following sub-questions:

1. How is the HDA applied?
  - a. What mediation strategies are used during the application of the HDA model?
  - b. What is the role of the mediator during the application of the model?
  - c. What is the role of ELL during the application of the model?
  - d. Which writing areas, i.e., language, organization, or content, are mediated during the application of the HDA model?
2. What is the impact of applying the HDA model on the development of six ELL' essay writing defined in terms of content, language and organization?
  - a. Which writing areas, i.e., language, organization, or content, if any, show development as a result of the application of the HDA model?
  - b. Which writing areas, i.e., language, organization, or content, if any, show no sign of development despite of the application of the HDA model?
3. How do ELL and teachers evaluate the proposed HDA model as a means of assessing their writing?

## 6. THE SAMPLE

The study followed a purposeful sampling strategy which is normally adopted in qualitative research. Patton (1990) defines purposeful sampling as a strategy which involves selecting cases which possess a certain characteristic. One particular purposeful sampling strategy suggested by Patton and which was employed in this study is that of random purposeful sampling. According to Patton, this sampling strategy helps reduce the bias which can be attributed to purposeful sampling and thus achieve higher credibility (p. 245). Thus, in an attempt to achieve random purposeful sampling, the criteria used to determine the participants of the study only included being Egyptian citizens and being enrolled in the English Language Institute (ELI) at The American University in Cairo, Egypt during the duration of the study.

Following this sampling strategy, the researcher first met with the head of the ELI to inform her about the study details including the procedures and benefits of the study for the department and English language learners in general. After that, the researcher sent an email to all the program teachers to inform them about the study. Two teachers responded to the researcher's email and expressed their willingness to take part in the study. Next, the researcher asked the two participating teachers for permission to go into their classes for 15 minutes to explain to students the purpose and procedures of the study. An informed consent form was then given to everyone in both classes and students were asked to place the form in a box by the door whether they have signed it or not. A total of six students from both classes agreed to take part in the study. It is worth mentioning that since the researcher was not the teacher of participant students, there was no risk that non-participating students would feel any threat by not participating in the study. The sample used for this study included six graduate students of different majors enrolled in the Academic English Program (AEP) in the English Language Institute (ELI) at the American University in Cairo (AUC), Egypt during spring 2011. There were no restrictions regarding the participants' gender or age. That is, the sample included male and female participants of different ages. In addition, the sample included the two teachers of the writing classes participating in the study.

## 7. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study adapted the research design previously followed by the majority of studies conducted on DA within different second language contexts (e.g., Ableeva, 2008; Anton as cited in Anton, 2009; Poehner, 2005). These studies all included three main stages which are: (1) a pre-test, (2) application of a DA model to a specific second language area, and (3) a post-test component.

### A. Stage I: The Pre-test

Following the design of Poehner (2005), this study included both a non-dynamic and dynamic pre-test component. In the non-dynamic pre-test, participants wrote an essay in the form of an integrated reading-to-write task. Students first read about the topic of the Egyptian revolution at home and then wrote a cause and effect essay on the writing prompt what do you think are the causes of the Egyptian revolution? This particular topic was selected by the researcher because of its relevance to the events taking place in Egypt where the study was conducted during the application of the study. The non-dynamic pre-test was scored by two non-participant IEP instructors using the currently employed essay scoring rubric used by AEP teachers to evaluate cause-and-effect essay writing (see Appendix B).



As for the dynamic assessment component of the pre-test, this was in the form of mediator-student conferences where the mediator met with each student and discussed the essay written in the non-dynamic pre-test. During this dynamic session, the interaction between the mediator and the students was spontaneous and based on the students' needs. The mediation was conducted mainly in Arabic to ensure that students understand what is being mediated. As suggested by Poehner (2005), after both the non-dynamic and dynamic components of the pre-test were conducted, the mediator documented the areas that were mediated during the session. A dynamic pre-test form was designed and filled out by the researcher/mediator (see Appendix C) for each student to note problematic writing areas showing potential for development. Finally, the two components of the pre-test, both non-dynamic and dynamic were later compared to the two post-test components in order to trace the impact of the proposed HDA model.

### *B. Stage II: Application of the HDA Model*

This stage included the application of the HDA model discussed above. Although the spring semester included 14 weeks, the study covered six weeks during the course of the semester (a total of 36 mediation sessions). The mediator met with students between 30-45 minutes per week. The reason behind excluding the first four and last four weeks of the semester is that during those weeks teachers are either introducing the course or preparing students for final tests. All in all there were six mediation sessions including the two dynamic components of the pre- and post-tests.

Before each mediation session, students emailed the mediator their papers which she read and identified suggested focus areas to be discussed during the mediation session. The mediator also identified errors and graded previously mediated writing areas and then discussed the assigned grades with students during each mediation session. In each of the student-mediator conferences, except for the first conference, the following procedures were carried out:

1. In the first part of the mediation session, the writing areas mediated in previous sessions were graded using the writing development rubric (see Appendix A). This part usually covered 15 minutes. In this section of the mediation session, the mediator showed the student samples of errors in areas previously mediated and asked them to correct those errors. Then the mediator either applied the writing development rubric with students to decide on the appropriate score for each area or discussed with students the grade she had already assigned.

2. In the remaining part of the session, a discussion of at least one area of strength in the paper and mediation of a new problematic writing area took place. First, the mediator asked students whether there was a particular

writing area they would like us to focus on during the session. Then, she suggested writing areas to mediate which were previously noted while reading their essays. Next, the writing area to be addressed in the session was negotiated. In each mediation session, one writing area was mediated during the session. In many instances, there was a correspondence between the students' and mediator's suggestions regarding which area to focus on during the session while in other instances students did not have any suggestions about which area to be discussed. The format of the interaction between the mediator and students was spontaneous in nature in terms of (1) the writing areas addressed; (2) the mediation strategies used, i.e. hinting, probing . . . etc., and (3) the degree of mediation explicitness.

3. In conferences three onwards, all writing areas discussed in previous conferences were considered in grading student development. That is, in writing conference two, only one area was be graded which was that mediated during writing conference one; while in writing conference three, two areas were graded which were those covered in writing conferences one and two and so on and so forth.

It is worth noting that prior to conducting the mediation sessions, the mediator watched sample DA mediation sessions provided by Poehner (2007); however, the mediator had no previous training regarding the application of the HDA model prior to the study. In addition, as suggested by many researchers (e.g., Ortiz, 1997), there were no language restrictions regarding the language used during the student-mediator interaction; that is, the mediator mainly used students' L1, i.e., Arabic, while interacting with students during the mediation sessions. This procedure was meant to ensure that students fully understood what is being mediated.

### *C. Stage III: Assessing the HDA Model*

This stage included two components: (1) a post-test, (2) and interviews. These two components were intended to address research question two and three respectively.

In order to answer research question two pertaining to the impact of the proposed HDA model on the essay writing of ELL, a post-test was conducted. Like the pre-test, the post-test included both a non-dynamic and dynamic component. In the non-dynamic component, students wrote another cause-and-effect essay on the writing prompts what do you think are some of the effects of the Egyptian revolution? The post-test prompt was selected by the researcher to be closely related to that of the pre-test.

The post-test essays were graded by two non-participant teachers using the AEP cause-and-effect writing rubric (see Appendix B). An inter-rater reliability index was conducted to examine the correlation between the two raters' scores. A correlation coefficient of 0.86,



which is considered a relatively high correlation, was reported. Since the purpose of the study did not involve examining whether the HDA model would produce significant results, the scores of the pre- and post-tests were used as one indicator of whether there has been potential improvement in students' writing development.

Like the dynamic component of the pre-test, the post-test included a dynamic component in which the mediator met with students and discussed the development of their writing over the course of the study as reflected in their post-test essays. Next, a post-test form indicating the areas showing improvement over the course of the study as well as areas that have shown no signs of improvement was filled out (see Appendix E). The data obtained from both the pre- and post-tests were then compared. The data analysis methods which were used for that purpose are discussed in more detail in a following section.

As for the interview component of this stage, it served to address research question three pertaining to how both parties evaluate the proposed HDA model as a means of assessing writing. Both student participants and their two teachers were individually interviewed by the researcher. The fact that the interviews were conducted by the researcher who also served as the mediator interacting with students throughout the study allowed for such a relationship between the interviewer and interviewees to be established. More information regarding this interviewing model is discussed in a later section.

## 8. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis stage of the data gathered from the abovementioned data collection methods proceeded in the sequence recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2005) where the researcher first coded the data collected using NVivo9 software program. In the second phase of the data analysis, the researcher compared the different concepts and themes found in the data in an attempt to address the aforementioned two research questions.

## 9. FINDINGS

### *A. Research question one: Applying the HDA model*

Although the main purpose of the present study is to explore the impact of the HDA on the essay writing of ESL learners, the researcher believes that since the proposed HDA model is a new assessment model, it is necessary to first explore the application of the proposed HDA model prior to presenting its impact on students' writing. The first step in order to achieve that end is to explore the different mediation strategies used during the application of the HDA model. It is worth noting, however, that this study is not intended to address mediation strategies in detail and that a detailed analysis of mediation strategies lies beyond the scope of the present study; therefore, in addressing mediation

strategies, this section only reports on the most commonly used mediation strategies.

A total of 36 mediation sessions, including the pre- and post- dynamic assessment components, were conducted and analyzed in order to explore the different mediation strategies used during the application of the proposed HDA model. The coding of the different mediation strategies emerged from the data during the analysis process rather than being predetermined. The analysis of the 36 mediation sessions revealed that a total of eight different mediation strategies were used during the mediation sessions. Table 1 provides a list of these strategies and their operational definitions.

**TABLE 1 MEDIATION STRATEGIES USED DURING THE APPLICATION OF THE HAD MODEL**

Name of Strategy	Definition
Correction	Mediator provides a correction of a student's wrong response.
Explanation	Mediator provides a clarification of an area in the student's writing. Clarification can take the form of providing an example.
Elicitation	Mediator attempts to lead a student to providing the correct response usually by reading the sentence and pausing at the faulty part or by using different probing questions.
Hinting	Mediator provides clues to help a student provide the correct response. These clues can take a variety of forms including asking certain questions to direct students to the correct response, repeating faulty part in the writing, and/or making a humorous comment.
Asking a direct question	Mediator asks a student a direct question related to the writing or what the student thinks about a particular part or structure in the writing.
Using a physical tool	Mediator and/or student use a physical artifact like paper, pencil, or notebook to respond during the mediation session.
Using non-verbal cues	Mediator uses non-verbal cues including laughs, humming, body language . . . etc. to lead student to the correct response.
Translation	Mediator translates, or asks student to translate, a sentence or more from the writing into Arabic.



Findings of the study show that a number of different mediation strategies were used during the application of the HDA model including the use of elicitation, explanation, correction, translation, hinting, use of physical tools, and use of non-verbal cues. The following extract from the data illustrates the use of a number of the strategies. During this session, the mediator (M) and Rabab (R) were discussing the use of certain tense forms. In this interaction the use of the active and passive is mediated.

1. R: Dr. Sharaf has hired to lead the ministers.
2. M: Tamam. olely eh rayik baah? (0.2) olely enty fy elhetta di awza tooly eh?  
O.k. Tell me what you think about this? (0.2) in this part what are you trying to say?
3. R: Tam taaeyin folan.  
So and so was hired
4. M: Tamam "tam taayin"  
Exactly "was hired"
5. M: Da active wala passive?  
Is this active or passive?
6. R: passive.
7. M: Exactly. Enty awza teemelyh "present perfect passive" sah?  
You want to use the present perfect passive, right?
8. R: Uhhhh
9. M: Mish ghalat. Tab ezay bakawin el "present perfect passive"? (0.4)  
It is not wrong. So how do I make the "present perfect passive"? (0.4)
10. M: Yaany haybaah eh?  
So what would it look like?
11. R: Has been hired.
12. M: Aywa.  
Yes.

In the above interaction, it seems that Rabab is struggling with the construction of the present perfect passive. In line 2, in the beginning of the interaction, the mediator uses the strategy of asking questions to ask Rabab what she thinks of the sentence she has just produced and what exactly she is trying to say. In line 3, Rabab provides a translation of the meaning she was trying to produce. In line 4, the mediator confirms Rabab's response and follows on to use translation, a mediation strategy which was also very frequent in the data. Next, in lines 5-10, the mediator proceeds to elicit from Rabab what she probably knows about the construction that corresponds to the meaning she is trying to deliver, i.e., the present perfect passive. The mediator attempts to achieve that goal by using a series of elicitation or probing questions. Finally, in line 11, Rabab produces the correction verb construction, and in line 12, the mediator confirms her answer. Thus, the above interaction illustrates a variety of mediation strategies

were used including elicitation, the use of direct questions, and translation.

Another finding relates to the role of the mediator during the application of the HDA model. The mediator was found to perform a number of procedural roles including beginning the mediation session, negotiating area of focus, using appropriate mediation strategies, summing up the session, and grading students' writing development using the writing development rubric specially designed for the present study. The mediator also provided affective and academic support as needed during the different mediation sessions.

As for students, they performed two main roles during the mediation sessions including requesting help from the mediator and negotiating area of focus. In the following interaction with Omar (O), for example, the mediator provides Omar with one suggested area to focus on which is the use of prepositions. Omar in return asks the mediator for other suggestions to choose from, thus implying that he does not prefer to discuss the area suggested by the mediator.

1. M: elhaga elly baktareh en ehna neshtaghal aleyha elmara dy heya elprepositions. Zay dy masalan.  
The thing I am suggesting for this time is preposition. Like this one for example.  
[Mediator points to an example of an error in prepositions in Omar's essay]
2. M: Eh rayaak teheb neshtaghal aleyaha?  
What do you think? Do you want us to work on that?
3. O: Tab feyh haga Tanya?  
Is there any other area?
4. M: Ah momken transitions zay however w keda aw complex sentence structure.  
Yes. We can work on transitions like "however" and so on or complex sentence like this one.  
[Mediator points to an example of an error in complex sentence in Omar's essay]
5. O: tayib asly ana hases innny law areyt tany hageb elprepositions.  
Actually I feel that if I reread the essay I could correct the preposition thing myself.
6. M: Tayib teheb eh?  
So what would you like us to work on?
7. O: Howa one point bas. Ehna monken nakhod eletnyn complex senetence structure w transitions.  
Do we have to work on one point only? Can't we cover both those points?
8. M: Tayib tamam wana keda keda mekhatatlak ala elprepositions so you can check them later.



O.k. and I have already underlined the preposition errors so you can check them later.

As the data reveals, Omar seems to take control of this part of the session by rejecting the initially suggested area by the mediator and proposing to discuss two areas not just one.

*B. Research question two: Impact of the HDA model*

Findings of the study also reveal that the HDA model has a positive impact on the different writing areas of content, language, and organization. The analysis of the pre-and post-tests showed that the majority of the writing areas partially developed, a few showed higher levels of development, mainly content writing issues, and only one language area showed no sign of improvement at all. Table 2 below provides the pre- and post- test scores for each of the six participants.

**TABLE 2 PRE AND POST TEST SCORES**

	Pre-test				Post-Test			
	L	C	O	T	L	C	O	Total
	55	25	20		55	25	20	<b>100</b>
Rabab	33	15	16	<b>64</b>	33	20	16	<b>69</b>
Gihad	33	15	12	<b>60</b>	38.5	20	16	<b>74.5</b>
Tamer	33	15	16	<b>64</b>	38.5	17.5	14	<b>70</b>
Ahmed	33	15	12	<b>60</b>	38.5	17.5	14	<b>70</b>
Omar	33	17.5	16	<b>66.5</b>	38.5	17.5	16	<b>72</b>
Roya	33	15	12	<b>60</b>	33	17.5	14	<b>64.5</b>

Note. C= Content L= Language O= Organization T=Total

As can be seen in Table 2, the writing of each of the six participants has shown improvement in at least one writing area. Rabab and Omar, for example, show improvement in content only whereas Gihad and Ahmed developed in all three writing areas. Tamer, on the other hand, achieved a higher grade in content and language whereas the organization of his post-test was scored lower than his pre-test. Finally, Roya's content and organization were scored higher on the post-test whereas her language score on the post test was the same as pre-test. All in all, it could be said that the pre- and post-tests of all six participants indicate some form of improvement in at least one writing category.

In order to provide a better picture of the improvement of the six participants' writing, the following section provides an examples from one of the six participants' [pseudonym Rabab] pre- and post-test essays in order to get a better picture of the achieved development. In

presenting this example, the writing areas mediated during the different mediation sessions are emphasized.

Rabab. Throughout the the five mediation sessions including the pre-test, the following areas were covered with Rabab: (1) Transfer of L1 sentence structure into L2 causing fragments and run-on sentences, (2) Word Form, (3) Verb tense formation, (4) Construction of Thesis statement, and (5) Subject verb agreement.

An analysis of Rabab's pre- and post-test essays shows that there is improvement in all five areas; however, some areas seemed to show more improvement than others. Examples of each of the above categories are shown in Table 3 below.

**TABLE 3 A COMPARISON OF RABAB'S PRE- AND POST- TEST ESSAYS**

Writing Focus	Pre-test Example	Post-test Example of Correct Responses/ Errors
Transfer of L1 sentence structure	This negatively impact the equal distribution of the rights such as job vacancies, consequently, youths came out . . . etc.	Conducting fair and impartial referendums and elections were essential demands of the revolution; consequently, the turnout participation was a reflection of the confidence that change is tangible.
Word form	Freedom, equity and good standard of live; these are the demands of the revolution in 25 January 2011.	The growing patriotic spirit in all Egyptians souls is the most value effect of the revolution.
Verb formation	After the suicide of the Tunisian guy because of poverty, feelings of Egyptians have pushed towards the change.	Obviously, the revolution of 25 January has raised the spirit of patriotism. After decades of political absence, Egyptians felt that they are responsible to change what formerly was impossible.
Thesis statement	In brief, equality, eradicate corruption and participate in the political forms are the main demands of the greatest revolution in the Egyptian history conducted by youths.	I believe that the main effect of the revolution on the Egyptian are the turnout participation in referendums and demonstrations.
Subject verb agreement	This usually negatively impact the equal distribution of rights.	No errors present



As shown in Table 3 there seems to be improvement in the five areas mediated during the application of the HDA with Rabab. For example, in regards to sentence structure, improvement is indicated by the construction of a correct sentence in the post-test essay which includes the transition “consequently” which had previously led to an erroneous structure in the pre-test. As for tense formation, it can be seen that the use of the present perfect tense in the pre-test also showed development as reflected in the presence of the correct usage of the structure in the post-test. In addition, the construction of the thesis statement seems to have also improved in terms of parallelism which was an issue in the pre-test but not in the post-test. However, despite the presence of evidence of improvement, it seems that this improvement is only partial due to the presence of few errors in the post-test essay related to each of the above categories. The same can be said about word-form. Although there are a number of instances of correct word form usage, it seems that Rabab is still having problems with word form as reflected in the presence of a number of word form errors in the post-test. As for subject-verb agreement, there were no errors present in the post-test which reflects that this structure has been mastered by Rabab after the application of the HDA model.

Based on the data obtained from Rabab’s pre- and post-test non dynamic components, it seems there has been partial improvement in almost all the areas mediated with Rabab (e.g., word form, verb formation, and L1 transfer of sentence structure) whereas subject-verb agreement and thesis construction have shown more improvement than other mediated areas.

Thus, based on the analysis of the six participants’ pre- and post-tests, it seems that there has been improvement in the six participants’ writing. This improvement varied in terms of the areas which have shown improvement; i.e., language, content, and organization as well as the degree of that improvement. In terms of areas of improvement, it seems that content and language areas both improved as well as organization although it was mediated once. As for the level of improvement, Table 4 below shows the level development of the five areas mediated with each of the six participants by categorizing them into one of the three development categories discussed earlier; i.e., (1) higher levels of development, (2) partial development, and (3) no signs of development

**TABLE 4 CATEGORIZING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDIATED AREAS COVERED DURING THE APPLICATION OF THE HDA MODEL**

Participant	Higher Levels of Development	Partial Development	No Signs of Development
Rabab	Subject-verb agreement Thesis construction	Word-form Transfer of L1 Sentence Structure Verb tense Formation	NA
Gihad	Overuse of certain vocabulary expressions Thesis construction Which-clauses	Transfer of L1 Sentence Structure Verb Tense usage	NA
Tamer	Paragraph topic and concluding sentences	The An/a Transfer of L1 Sentence Structure Passive structure	NA
Ahmed	Thesis construction	Verb tense Formation Article usage Transfer of L1 structure Use of empty vocabulary words	NA
Omar	NA	Definite articles Transfer of L1 structure Transitions Embedded questions Present perfect	NA
Roya	Thesis construction and paragraph topic sentences	Transfer of L1 structure verb tense formation Definite article	Construction of Noun clauses

*c. Research question three: Assessing the HDA model*

Finally, participants reported their positive evaluation of the model. As for the two teachers, they too expressed their willingness to implement the HDA model in their writing classes; however, they also stated that they had two concerns regarding the model including time-constraints and students’ expectations regarding teacher feedback. One common theme that was mentioned by the majority of the participants was that the HDA model was an individualized assessment method in the sense that it focuses on students’ individual needs. Gihad, for example, mentioned that what she liked about the model was that “the rubric [the writing development rubric] is specific and not general”. She summed up her evaluation of the model by stating that “people don’t have the same problems” and accordingly implied that people should not be all assessed in a generic manner that does not reflect their individual problems.



## 10. DISCUSSION

### A. Research Question One: Application of the HDA Model

Research question one addresses the application of the HDA model by exploring the different mediation strategies used, the roles of the mediator and students, and the writing areas mediated during the application of the HDA model.

#### *Mediation Strategies*

The analysis of the data shows that a variety of mediation strategies were used during the application of the HDA model including elicitation, the most common strategy, asking questions, explanation, hinting, translation, correction, using a physical tool, and using non-verbal cues, the least frequent strategy. A number of studies examining the different mediation behaviors and strategies used during the application of different DA approaches seem to report similar results to those reported by the present study (e.g. Aljaafreh & Lantolf 1994; Poehner 2005). In accordance with this finding regarding the nature of mediation strategies and behaviors used during the application of the HDA model, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) also report similar findings. The researchers investigated the nature of feedback provided on lower-order concerns by examining the interaction that took place between the tutor and the tutee during the different mediations sessions. Like the present study, the researchers also reported that a variety of mediation strategies were used during the mediation sessions ranging from implicit to explicit strategies. Nevertheless, Aljaafreh and Lantolf's study seems to be more concerned with the degree of explicitness/implicitness of the mediation provided than it is with the description of each of the mediation strategies used. This issue regarding the degree of mediation implicitness is discussed in more detail in the following section addressing findings related to the role of the mediator during the application of HDA model. In his study of the impact of DA on second language learning, Poehner (op.cit.) too reports the use of mediation behaviors similar to those reported by the present study. Poehner maintains that the mediator "offered suggestions, posed questions, made corrections and helped [students] think through decisions concerning selection of lexical items, verb tense and other language difficulties" (Poehner op.cit.).

#### *Role of the Mediator*

The fact that the role of the mediator can be clearly outlined in the form of predefined procedural and affective roles could be considered beneficial since it can facilitate the process of training mediators on the implementation of the proposed HDA model in different ESL contexts. At the same time, the fact that the

description of these procedural roles is also flexible in the sense that mediators have the option to make spontaneous changes as deemed necessary during applying the model with individual students is also important since spontaneous interaction is a defining characteristic of the proposed HDA model.

#### *The Role of the Students*

One role found to be performed by students in the application of HDA is that of negotiating focus area with the mediator. This negotiation of focus area allows for students' participation in the process of their own assessment, an issue sometimes referred to in DA literature as learner reciprocity (e.g., Lidz 198; Poehner 2008) or intentionality (Feuerstein 1979). Poehner and Lantolf (2005) maintain that reciprocity "describes the interaction between the learner and the mediator since the actions of both are necessarily intertwined" (241). However, Poehner (ibid.) rightly maintains that "to date, both interventionist and interactionist DA have given considerable attention to determining the types of mediation offered in their procedures but the learners' contributions have generally been assumed and not sufficiently theorized" (85). In other words, unlike the present study which emphasizes the roles played by students during the application of the HDA model, it seems that the role of students has not yet been given appropriate attention in research on DA.

### B. Research Question Two: Impact of the HDA Model

The overarching finding of the present study is that application of the model leads to improvement in the writing of the six ESL learners as defined in terms of the three writing areas of language, content, and organization. This finding is similar to those reported by the few studies conducted on the use of different DA models in second language context. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) report the effectiveness of DA in the form of feedback provided on students' writing in improving ESL students' grammar. However, whereas Aljaafreh and Lantolf focused on one aspect of writing only which is that of grammar, the present study reported the effectiveness of the HDA in improving a number of writing aspects including content, organization, and language use.

In their investigation of the use of DA with Spanish and French learners, Anton (as cited in Anton, 2009) and Poehner (2005), too, report positive results regarding the use of DA in second language learning contexts. Anton, for example, reports that employing DA in placement tests can provide important information regarding specific language problems individual students have and could consequently lead to better placement decisions. Such a finding corresponds to that emerging from interviews with participants of the present study who also reported that the use of the HDA model allowed them to



concentrate on their individual weaknesses and consequently help them overcome these weaknesses in subsequent papers.

Thus, Findings of the present study are in line with those reported by similar studies exploring the impact of different DA approaches on second language learning.

### C. Research Question Three: Evaluation of the HDA Model

To my knowledge, none of the studies investigating the use of DA in promoting second language learning seem to include a component where participants evaluated the model used to assess their learning. In other words, research examining the impact of DA in second language contexts seems to be more concerned with evaluating this assessment method by exploring its impact on learning measured in terms of students' performance. However, I believe that considering what those applying the model, i.e., students and mediators, think about HDA is as important as exploring the impact of the model on students' performance.

## 11. CONCLUSION

In this study, a HDA assessment has been introduced which I argue can be used to assess student learning in an interactive manner by which student learning can be both maximized and quantified using clear procedures which also allow for flexibility.

The impact of the proposed HDA model on the writing of the six ESL learners' was explored and found to lead to the improvement of the different writing areas mediated. In addition, students and teachers reported their positive evaluation of the model since, as they mentioned, it allowed students to focus on their individual weaknesses.

Based on the findings of the present study, the researcher believes that the introduction of the HDA model in ESL writing classrooms can help overcome many of the problems associated with the use of standardized tests alone to evaluate ESL writing and help students improve their writing in the process of assessing their learning development. In doing so, the long- lasting gap between assessment and instruction could be bridged.

## REFERENCES

- Ableeva, R. (2009). *Dynamic assessment of listening comprehension in second language learning*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.
- Aljaafreh, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (1994). Negative feedback as regulation and second language learning in the zone of proximal development. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78, 465-483.
- Antón, M. (2009). Dynamic assessment of advanced language learners. *Foreign Language Annals*, 42(3), 576-598.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2004). *The sociogenesis of second language development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2004). Dynamic assessment of L2 development: Bringing the pas Lidz, C. S. (Ed.). (1987). *Dynamic assessment: An interactional approach to evaluating learning potential*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Lidz, C. S. (Ed.). (1987). *Dynamic assessment: An interactional approach to evaluating learning potential*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Minick, N. (1987). Implications of Vygotsky's theories for dynamic assessment. In C. S. Lidz (Ed.), *Dynamic assessment: An interactional approach to evaluating learning potential* (pp. 116-140). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Poehner, M. E. (2005). *Dynamic assessment of oral proficiency among advanced L2 learners of French*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University). University Park.
- Poehner, M. E. (2008). *Dynamic assessment: A Vygotskian approach to understanding and promoting second language development*. Berlin: Springer.
- Poehner, M. E., & Lantolf, J. P. (2005). Dynamic assessment in the language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 9(3), 1-33.
- Rubin, H. J., Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. 3rd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications.
- Stiggins, R. (2005). *Assessment for learning defined*. Retrieved from <http://www.assessmentinst.com/wpcontent/uploads/2009/05/afldefined.pdf>
- Tzuriel, D. (2001). Dynamic assessment is not dynamic testing. *Issues in Education*, 7, 237-249.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



**Appendix A**

**The Writing Development Rubric**

**Student name:**

**Essay Title:**

**Writing conference number:**

**Paper number:**

**Focus Area(s) suggested by mediator:**

**Focus Area(s) suggested by student:**

**Negotiated focus area to be mediated in this session:**

**Focus areas to be graded from previous session(s)**

**Area of strength to be discussed:**

	5	4	3	2	1	Examples of error
<b>Focus area one</b>	No errors/problems of this category are present in the paper	A few errors/problems are present in the paper but not consistently	frequent errors/problems are present in the paper but there is occasional evidence that some development has taken place	Errors/problems are consistently present throughout the paper. There is little evidence of development.	Errors/problems are still consistently present throughout the paper. There is no evidence of any development present in the paper.	
<b>Focus area two</b>	No errors/problems of this category are present in the paper	A few errors/problems are present in the paper but not consistently	frequent errors/problems are present in the paper but there is occasional evidence that some development has taken place	Errors/problems are consistently present throughout the paper. There is little evidence of development.	Errors/problems are still consistently present throughout the paper. There is no evidence of any development present in the paper.	
<b>Focus area Three</b>	No errors/problems of this category are present in the paper	A few errors/problems are present in the paper but not consistently	frequent errors/problems are present in the paper but there is occasional evidence that some development has taken place	Errors/problems are consistently present throughout the paper. There is little evidence of development.	Errors/problems are still consistently present throughout the paper. There is no evidence of any development present in the paper.	
<b>Total</b>						



**Appendix B**  
**ELI Writing Program Rubric<sup>1</sup>**

<b>CONTENT/IDEAS</b>	The presence of a focused thesis that clearly addresses the question, and ideas that are focused on the topic throughout the essay and that are developed through reasons, facts, explanations, examples, details, statistics, opinions, and/or anecdotes.
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	The order and logical flow of ideas developed and sustained within and across paragraphs using connective devices (transitional words, key words, pronoun consistency, etc.) and including introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion.
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	Production of: 1) sentences with appropriate boundaries, including punctuation of sentence endings; 2) a variety of sentence structures including simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex, and embedded clause structures. 3) correct grammar. 4) word choice (including phrasal verbs) and word form.

---

<sup>1</sup> Copyright [2010] by The American University of Cairo. Reprinted with permission.