

Dynamic Assessment of EFL Learners' Reading Strategies: Introducing 'Sauce'-Format Mediation

Ghorban Ahmadi ¹, Behrooz Azabdaftari ^{2*}, Seyyed Mohammad Alavi ³

^{1,2} *Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran*

³ *Department of English, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran*

*Corresponding author: azabdaftari@iaut.ac.ir

(Received: 2021/6/27; Accepted:2021/8/24)

Online publication: 2021/8/25

Abstract

Sandwich and cake formats of interventionist Dynamic Assessment suffer from two problems: both are time-demanding, and the intervention presented to the learners varies from one learner to another. To suggest a solution to the above problems in teaching and assessing reading strategies, the present researchers have introduced 'sauce'-format mediation through which intervention is provided for the learners within 'mediation boxes' along the test. Thirty Iranian intermediate EFL learners participated in the study. They were first given a non-mediated reading pretest, and then they took the same test along with a 'mediation box' following each question to observe the probable effect of 'sauce'-format mediation. To measure the transcendence of the given mediation, the participants answered a non-mediated delayed posttest at the end. Comparing the means of the mediated posttest and non-mediated pretest on the one hand and those of the non-mediated delayed posttest and the pretest on the other revealed that the learners benefitted significantly well from the 'sauce'-format mediation and could transfer their learning to a novel context. Findings of this study are consistent with the previous research on DA that intervention supports learner development.

Keywords: dynamic assessment, reading strategies, sauce-format mediation, assesstruction, mediation box

Introduction

Dynamic Assessment (henceforth DA) is an approach to assessment and instruction that derives its principles and procedures from Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). DA challenges traditional views on instruction and assessment by arguing that they must be unified into a single activity in which various forms of support are provided in order to display the scope of learners' abilities while simultaneously helping their development. DA procedures can be considered then as those in which assessment is accompanied by an instructional intervention (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002, p. 23).

DA in second language learning (L2 DA) envisions that since learners' language ability is always approaching the potential zone (that is why it is called 'dynamic'), the conventional non-dynamic (Static as it is called by some) assessment tools are not able to tap the learners' real abilities. In other words, the advocates of DA claim that Static Assessment (SA) can only measure the learners' actual level of performance (what they can perform independently) but cannot assess their potential level of ability (what they can perform with assistance).

Historically, DA was primarily proposed to help retarded and at-risk learners with low IQ rate in their learning problems in 1920s and 1930s. Vygotsky, for example, believed that the IQ tests of the time were not able to reveal meaningful information about testees' learning ability. He claimed that IQ tests must measure the extent of learners' potential ability to learn rather than their present IQ rate. He said two learners, one with high IQ and the other with low IQ, may start learning at the same time, but after some training the one with low IQ might progress more than the one with high IQ. After the publication of Vygotsky's works in the western world in the 1960s and the 1970s, many people started to apply his ideas in educating normal children and adults. In 1980s and 1990s, scholars from different fields like mathematics, geography, language education, and some others began to deploy DA principles in their own cognitive domain.

Because of the interest of many different people from different backgrounds to contribute to the expansion of DA, it is defined from different scholars' professional perspectives. Sternberg and Grigorenko

(2002), for instance, see it as a procedure whose outcome takes into account the results of an intervention. In this intervention, the examiner teaches the examinee how to perform better on individual items or on the test as a whole. The final score may be a learning score representing the difference between pretest (before learning) and posttest (after learning) scores, or it may be the score on the posttest considered alone (cited in Poehner and Lantolf, 2005, p. 234).

Instruction is an integral part of DA. In fact, assessment and instruction in DA are seen as two sides of the same coin and it is this fact which distinguishes it from the non-dynamic approaches. As Lantolf and Thorne (2006) put it, "genuine assessment is not possible unless it is accompanied by instruction and vice-versa" (p. 357). Actually the goal of DA is "to unify assessment and instruction into a single activity, the goal of which is learner development" (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, p. 254).

A point which should be clarified in defining DA is the term 'assessment'. The meaning of the word 'assessment' in DA is different from its sense in psychology and education. In psychology and education it implies observing and recording the learners' behaviors and assigning a score to show their ability. While in DA, assessment refers to instruction and assessment as a single activity to observe the extent to which the learners are able to transform their abilities in assessment context to novel non-assessment contexts. In DA there is no need to divide the curriculum into teaching and testing phases rather they occur at the same time through a single activity. Therefore, assessment in dynamic sense refers to not only assessing (measuring) the learners' abilities but also to teaching new materials (helping learners to learn). Hence, to make the concept more clear, it might be helpful to coin a new term 'assesstruction' to encompass both assessment and instruction.

The unique characteristic of 'assesstruction' is the mediation or intervention which the mediator makes during treatment process in order to support the subjects to move forward (develop) in their ZPD. The philosophy of this process lies in Vygotsky's idea that the relationship between man and the world is mediated by cultural artifacts. Of course, in low-level mental processes – such as involuntary attention, involuntary reflex, and involuntary memory – the human-world relationship is direct.

However, in the developmental processes (that is, high-level mental processes) the relation is indirect.

In 'assesstruction', the teacher/assessor mediates between the learner/assessee and instructional/assessment objectives. The teacher attempts to assist the learner to move from his actual level of development to his potential level, to move within his ZPD, by giving him the needed support through appropriate intervention. Therefore, the teacher's major responsibility in an 'assesstruction' context is first to diagnose the learner's actual and potential levels of development and then to provide them with the appropriate assistance to be effective in developing the learner.

Although "DA is relatively unknown in Applied Linguistics" (Poehner, 2008, p. 91), we have recently witnessed a growing interest among language pedagogy specialists to add DA assumptions and principles in their career. Lantolf and Poehner are two people who pioneered the application of DA principles in L2 education in the last two decades (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010; Lantolf & Poehner, 2010; Poehner, 2008; Poehner, 2007; Poehner, 2005; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Lantolf & Poehner, 2004; Lantolf, 2000). Poehner (2005), for example, made a comprehensive research on the dynamic assessment of advanced L2 learners of French; Ableeva (2008) investigated the effects of dynamic assessment on L2 listening, and Kuzulin and Garb (2002) studied the effect of dynamic assessment on the EFL learners' text comprehension.

Kozulin and Garb (2002) using an interventionist approach (pretest – mediation – posttest design) sandwiched the mediation phase between a non-dynamic pretest and posttest. In their study, the pretest consisted of a short text in English followed by a set of comprehension questions. After the non-dynamic pretest, teachers (mediators) reviewed the test with their students. In this mediation phase, the teachers mediated for the students "the strategies required in each item, building together with the students process models for each item, and indicating how strategies can be transferred from one task to another"(p. 119). At the end the students were given a non-dynamic posttest of reading parallel to the pretest. In order to observe the degree of the students' benefit from mediation, they devised a formula to calculate what they called a Learning Potential Score (LPS).

According to Kozulin and Garb, the LPS is the difference between the students' pretest and posttest scores.

Kozulin and Garb found that "many of the students indeed benefitted from mediation and were able to apply the acquired strategies to the new text"(p. 120). They also interpreted the observed negative correlation between gain and pretest scores as showing that the pretest scores reflected the students' actual performance level but not their learning potential.

DA emerged due to the problems which current non-dynamic approaches to assessment suffered from. Conventional psychometric assessment procedures can neither satisfy the scholars' academic expectations nor can they meet the philosophical, ideological, and pragmatic demands of modern democratic societies and educational systems. Feuerstein et al (1987, p. 37) list the "inadequacy of both the underlying assumptions and the practical outcomes of conventional psychometric tests, their modes of presentation, and the resulting interpretations" as the reasons for disenchantment with psychometric theory and practice. The underlying assumptions of dynamic and non-dynamic assessments are radically different from each other's. DA advocates assert that cognitive functions being assessed are modifiable and in any assessment process their modifiability and the subjects' potential for learning are the goal of exploration; however, in NDA everything is done for avoiding any change to take place in the administration of an assessment. DA outcomes encompass reports about the subjects' performance on the given task/s which indicate their actual level of development, potential level of development, their degree of responsiveness, and their ability to transcend their abilities from assessment contexts to non-assessment contexts. In contrast, NDA procedures produce scores which only indicate how well the subjects are able to do on the given task/s; that is, their present ability, and they cannot tell anything about their potential for learning in the future.

Modes of presentation of NDA tools are also disenchanting. NDAs are presented for the subjects as a set of questions to which they should respond. The subjects are put in an isolated and highly controlled context where any kind of intervention and assistance to them is considered cheating and so is banned. While in DA, the subjects are assessed during instruction and there is not such an isolation and mediators intervene in the process of

assessment in order to promote the subjects' potential abilities. Interpretations based on the subjects' scores in NDA tools are only limited to what they know and do at present. In other words, the NDA scores can only be interpreted as indicators of the subjects' past development; in contrast, we need a system which enables us to make interpretations about the subjects' potential for learning and their ability of transferring their performance from assessment context to real-life situations.

Due to intercultural and interethnic differences among different contexts in the world from which the learners/examiners come from, conventional standardized tests are not able to measure their real abilities as they are. Some cultures impose limits on the testees to respond specific kinds of test formats and hence their incorrect responses to test items may be due to some other non-ability factors like their unfamiliarity with the test format than to their lack of knowledge. While in DA procedures, since the tester intervenes in the assessment process, s/he can help the testees overcome such negative factors.

Besides disenchantment with Static Assessment, DA itself has some practical problems. A common practical problem with both interactionist and interventionist approaches to DA is that they are time demanding. A special problem with the interactionist approach is that especially trained mediators (teachers) are needed to help learners within DA framework. Interventionist approach, both its sandwich and cake formats, may be suitable for classroom settings where learners are at hand for a long period of time, but in non-classroom settings, such as selection tests, where the testees are at access for a few hours, it is indeed impossible to use interventionist procedures. Thus, we suggest that, in order to make DA more flexible to be used in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes, we give the written mediation along each test item within a 'mediation box'. We name this form of mediation as 'sauce' format to follow the tradition of using terms from nutrition science. We think this format has at least two advantages:

Since separate sessions of interaction/intervention are not needed between the assessor and the assessees, DA becomes more practical, and it is hoped that more testers may be willing to use DA procedures

in their career. In fact, interaction is between the learner and 'mediation boxes'.

All the mediated testees receive the same quantity and quality of mediation through the same channel (writing), which can contribute to the reliability of both scores and mediation – a matter mostly challenged by critics of DA.

With regard to the theoretical problems with NDA and practical problems with current models of DA, this study pursues the following two purposes: 1) to explore whether mediation during assessment ('sauce'-format mediation) helps EFL testers/teachers to observe the testees/learners' potential level of using reading strategies; and 2) to suggest a new form of reading test mediated by 'sauce' format by which EFL learners' both actual and potential proficiency of reading strategies can be assessed.

RQ1. To what extent may 'sauce'-format mediation affect Iranian EFL learners' use of reading strategies?

RQ2. To what extent can Iranian EFL learners transfer their ability of using reading strategies from a context mediated by 'sauce'-format to non-mediated contexts?

Method

Participants

Thirty university students majoring in TEFL whose English language proficiency was at intermediate level participated in this study. They were chosen from among 124 students who first had taken the Solutions Placement Test (SPT: a general English proficiency Test) to find out their general English proficiency. Ninety six students whose scores on the test were above 38, indicating that - according to the instructions of the test - their general English proficiency was at intermediate level, were selected. Then they were given a non-mediated reading pretest to both control their background reading knowledge and measure their actual level of reading ability. Thirty students whose scores on the reading pretest fell within minus and plus one standard deviation were finally selected to participate in the study. All the participants, their age ranging from 18 to 25, were male and female university students majoring in TEFL at the universities in the north-west of Iran.

Instruments and Materials

Four tests were used in the study which included Solutions Placement Test (SPT), a pretest, a posttest, and a delayed posttest.

Solutions Placement Test (SPT)

Solutions Placement Test, developed by Lynda Edwards (2007, Oxford University Press), is a placement test by which teachers can decide at which level of proficiency their students are. The test contains 50 multiple-choice questions of grammar and vocabulary, a reading text with 10 comprehension questions, and an optional writing task. For practical reasons, the optional section of Writing was excluded from this study and students were interpreted on their scores on Grammar and Vocabulary and Reading sections. According to the test instructions, those who got above 30 in Grammar and Vocabulary section and above 8 in Reading section were considered to be at intermediate level.

In this project, three reading tests (a pretest, a posttest, and a delayed posttest) which were constructed by the researchers were used. The texts for the tests were taken from *Concepts and Comments* (Third Ed.) (Ackert & Lee, 2005), a reading textbook for teaching reading to intermediate learners. Each test contains two passages of about 850 words, and each is followed by 15 question items, five True/False and ten Multiple-Choice. The pretest and posttest were similar except in that the former was non-mediated while the latter was mediated by 'mediation boxes'. The delayed posttest was different from the pretest and posttest in content but was parallel to them in terms of text subject, passage difficulty, and question difficulty with a pilot group. The information regarding reading passages appears in Table 1.

Table 1

Description of passages in Reading Tests

Test	Passage	Title	Subject	Length	No of Items
Pretest and	1	Cave Paintings	Art	700 words	T/F: 5; MC: 10
Posttest	2	Amnesty International	Organization	781 words	T/F: 5; MC: 10
Delayed	1	Graffiti	Art	853 words	T/F: 5; MC: 10
posttest	2	UNICEF	Organization	810 words	T/F: 5; MC: 10

Note: T/F=True/False; MC=Multiple Choice

In each test the subject of Passage 1 is about 'Art' and Passage 2 about 'Organization'. The similarity of the passage subjects prevents the influence of the students' prior topical knowledge on their performance.

Pretest

The pretest included two passages entitled 'Cave Paintings' and 'Amnesty International' respectively. The subject of the first passage was about Art and the second one about Organization. Each passage was followed by five True/False and ten Multiple-Choice questions. The participants took the test without any accompanied support or mediation since the purpose was to measure their actual level of using reading strategies.

Posttest

This test was similar to the pretest but each question in it was followed by a written 'mediation box' which included prompts and instructions to lead the assessees to use their reading strategies to answer the item. Most of the prompts were in the form of questions. The assessees were instructed, before starting to answer the questions, through a sample item to answer the mediating questions or follow the mediating instructions by themselves. They were also instructed that their responses to the prompts in the 'mediation boxes' would help them call their reading strategies for help that might not have been used otherwise. Ultimate care was taken to avoid giving the correct answers for the students but to help them arrive at the answers themselves.

Since 'mediation boxes' are the most important part of a mediated reading test, outmost care should be taken in designing and preparing it. In this study some limited but more frequently used reading strategies were selected to be mediated. The list of strategies mediated in this study is provided in the Appendix.

Delayed Posttest

This test was different from, but parallel to, the posttest in that it did not include any mediation. It was administered like a traditional non-dynamic test, as the pretest, without any interaction on the part of the teacher. It was given to the group after the 'sauce'-format mediated posttest in order to observe the testees' ability of transcending their learning from a mediated test to an independent non-mediated test. The reason for investigating the transcendence in the present research is that DA procedures have not opened a place for themselves yet and almost all the tests in educational and non-educational settings are administered non-dynamically. Teachers can, by giving and practicing dynamic tests in their classes, instruct learners to use relevant strategies to comprehend and answer reading texts and questions. However, the question is whether learners are able to transfer (transcend) assisted performance to non-assisted settings. Comparing the learners' performance on the non-mediated delayed posttest with their performance on the pretest can reveal such a transcendence.

Procedures

In order to determine the participants' proficiency level, the Solutions Placement Test was given to 124 university students. Ninety six of the subjects who lied at intermediate level were selected to be given the reading pretest. It was given to the chosen participants for two purposes: a) to control their background reading knowledge and select a homogeneous group in terms of reading ability, and b) to assess their actual level of using reading strategies. Thirty of them who scored one standard deviation below and above the mean on the test were finally selected. After two weeks, the group took the 'sauce'-format mediated posttest. In fact, the 'sauce'-format mediation provided within the 'mediation boxes' along the items formed the treatment of the study. The following is an example of a question mediated in 'sauce'-format.

Question: *The paintings on the walls of Chauvet Cave are about 31000 years old.* T/F

For answering this question, the learners were supposed to understand the following part of the text:

Line 10 Archeologists who inspected the cave paintings soon after they were
 Line 11 discovered estimated that the paintings were about 17000 years old. A few
 Line 12 months later, however, tests showed that three of the animals in the
 Line 13 paintings were at least 31000 years old.

The following ‘mediation box’ which includes two prompts in question form was supposed to help the participants to reach the reading strategy “understanding relations within the sentence”. The questions in the ‘mediation box’, in fact, turned the attention of participants to the subject in the stem (*the paintings*) which referred to one of the figures (*17000 or 31000*) in the text.

Mediation Box

1. What is the subject in the T/F statement?
 2. Which are the subjects in the following 'that' clauses in the text?
 "... that the paintings were about 1700 years old." (line 11)
 "... that three of the animals in the paintings were at least 31000 years old." (line 12)
-

The performance of the group on both pretest and posttest was compared using paired t-test analysis. The assumption was that if the difference between the means were significant enough, it would be claimed that ‘sauce’-format mediation was efficient.

To see whether the learners could transcend (transfer) their learning from tests mediated by ‘sauce’ format to non-mediated independent tests, the group was given the non-mediated delayed posttest two weeks after they had taken the mediated posttest. Then, the students’ scores on the pretest and delayed posttest were compared through paired t-test. Since the pretest and delayed posttest were parallel, any difference in the means between them could be interpreted as the transcendence of mediation they received on the mediated posttest.

This research was quasi-experimental and followed a ‘one-group pretest – posttest – delayed posttest’ design. The treatment (‘sauce’-format mediation) was given within ‘mediation boxes’ along with the comprehension questions in the posttest.

Results

The purpose in question 1 was to observe the probable effect of ‘sauce’-format mediation on the subjects' performance on reading tests. Scores of the group on pretest and posttest were compared to see if the difference in performance was statistically significant. For doing so, the observed scores were subjected to SPSS and paired t-test analysis was carried out.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Group's Performance on Pretest and Posttest

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	30	23.13	1.81
Posttest	30	26.00	1.30
Valid N (listwise)	30		

The descriptive statistics of the group's performance on the pretest and posttest are represented in Table 2. As the group's mean on the posttest shows (M=26), the participants have performed better on it as compared to the pretest (M=23.13). This may be due to the mediation they have received in the ‘mediation boxes’ along the test items. The result of the paired samples t-test is provided in Table3.

Table 3

Paired Samples t-test for Pretest and Posttest

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest –Posttest	-15.383	29	.000

The results of the paired samples t-test of the pretest and posttest in Table 3 show that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, $t(29)=15.38$, $p=.00<.05$ (two-tailed). This finding indicates that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest. It is likely that the ‘mediation boxes’ in the posttest had significant effect on the participants' performance on the reading tests.

RQ 2 aimed to observe if Iranian EFL learners were able to transcend their learning from the ‘sauce’-format mediated posttest to the non-mediated reading tests. To observe the probable transcendence of learning from

mediation, the group members' scores on the delayed posttest were compared with theirs on the pretest. Finally, the observed scores were subjected to SPSS and paired t-test analysis was carried out to see if the difference in performance was statistically meaningful.

One of the important attributes of DA is the matter of Transcendence (TR). Very simply, TR is applying mediated learning in novel contexts. The significance of TR lies in the fact that the ability of learners to transcend their appropriated functions to new contexts shows the extent of their benefit from mediation. To observe the ability of transcendence of the research sample, the students' scores on the non-mediated delayed posttest were compared with theirs on the pretest.

Table 4
Paired Samples t-test for Pretest and Delayed Posttest

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest – Delayed posttest	-58.86	29	.000

The results of the paired samples t-test in Table 4 showed that the mean of the delayed posttest was significantly different from the mean of the pretest, $t(29)=58.86$, $p=.00<.05$. This means that the participants were able to transfer their learned ability from mediation in the mediated posttest to an independent context in the non-mediated delayed posttest.

Discussion

In this research two major goals were followed: to investigate the effect of 'sauce'-format mediation of reading strategies on learners' ability to use these strategies and to examine the transcendence of learning from 'sauce'-format mediation to non-mediated tests. The results indicated that learners benefitted well from the 'sauce'-format mediation provided within 'mediation boxes' and could transcend their learning to an independent test.

Comparing the participants' performance on pretest with theirs on posttest indicated that their performance had improved due to the support they received within mediation boxes. This finding is in line with the previous research on DA where it has been succulently articulated that intervention

supports learner development (Poehner, 2005; Poehner, 2008; Kozulin & Garb, 2002).

Similar to previous research, analyzing the participants' responses to the test questions in the posttest made it clear that their answers would be otherwise if mediation were not presented to them. For example, 70% of the subjects had answered the following item incorrectly in the pretest, while in the mediated posttest 80% of them answered it correctly:

The paintings on the walls of Chauvet Cave are about 31000 years old.
T/F

Answering this item involved understanding the following section of the passage:

Line 10 *Archeologists who inspected the cave paintings soon after they were*
Line 11 *discovered estimated that the paintings were about 17000 years old. A few*
Line 12 *months later, however, tests showed that three of the animals in the*
Line 13 *paintings were at least 31000 years old.*

Learners were supported on this item by the following mediation box:

Mediation Box

3. *What is the subject in the T/F statement?*
 4. *What are the subjects in the following 'that' clauses in the text?*
"... that the paintings were about 1700 years old." (line 11)
"... that three of the ani.a ls in the paintings were at least 31000 years old." (line 12)
-

Figures 17000 and 31000 were used in the text but the questions in the mediation box directed the learners' attention to the subject which referred to any of these figures. This, in fact, helped the learners to use strategy 9 (understanding relations within the sentence). As the comparison of the proportion of the correct responses to this item in the pretest (30%) and posttest (50%) show, mediation has helped learners use strategy 9, that is, attend to the relations between and among sentence elements, in the case of this item subject-verb relation.

As another example, before receiving mediation, 75% of the learners had answered the following item incorrectly:

Before the discovery of Chauvet Cave, archeologists thought that

- a) *people painted for religious reasons.*
- b) *exposing cave paintings to light and air wouldn't damage them.*
- c) *people learned to draw and paint gradually over thousands of years.*
- d) *people did not need a long time to learn to draw and paint.*

Answering this item involved understanding the following paragraph of the text:

Line 38 *Perhaps the most interesting thing about Chauvet cave is that it has forced*
 Line 39 *archeologists to change their ideas about art. For many years, archeologists*
 Line 40 *believed that it took thousands of years for humans to gradually learn how to*
 Line 41 *draw and paint. Chauvet Cave showed that there were great artists 30000 years*
 Line 42 *ago. Jean Clottes summed it up, saying, "Our ancestors did not need millennia of*
 Line 43 *trial and error to achieve great art. Artistic capacity was one of the components*
 Line 44 *of our species probably right from the start."*

However, after receiving the following mediation in the posttest, they had changed their responses; 80% had chosen the correct response:

Mediation Box

1. *What forced the archeologists to change their ideas about art? (line 38)*
 2. *Does the phrase "for many years" refer to the years before or after the discovery of Chauvet Cave? (line 39)*
 3. *Does the phrase "for many years, archeologists believed "" imply that they still believe so? (line 39)*
-

This mediation box helped learners use strategies 11, that is, *understanding relations between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices*, and 18, *identifying and interpreting discourse markers* (Appendix). The considerable increase in the learners' correct responses after being mediated shows that many of them would be interpreted as unable to answer the item correctly if mediation were not provided.

An important point in preparing appropriate mediation for a group must be that mediation should be directed to the least able member of the group and at the same time should provide the support for the most able one. For example, for solving a problem (answering an item) the least able learner might need 10 hints of support, and the most able one 4 hints. The mediator should prepare all 10 hints assuming that the former learner in this example

will benefit from all the hints but the latter will skip the first six hints (due to the fact that he does not need them) and will benefit from the last four hints; provided that supportive hints are ordered from the most implicit to the most explicit. From this one can see that preparing appropriate mediation is as important as preparing good test items in dynamic assessment.

One of the findings of this research was that learners' performance improved in response to uniform mediation. This might have different implications to mediators. First, they do not have to worry about reliability of scores obtained on a mediated test. Second, one of the problems of dynamic tests, that is, preparing appropriate individualized mediation to every learner, is solved by mediating them in groups. Group mediation involves understanding learners' both ZAD and ZPD. Mediation aimed at a group must be appropriate and sensitive to the needs of all members of the group. One, however, might argue that predicting different learners' needs in a group is not an easy task. While admitting such an argument, we should remember that in educational systems learners are usually placed in different groups according to some similarities, e.g. their age, background knowledge etc. Experience also shows that members of a group in an educational context are not drastically different from each other. So, through introductory needs analysis, a mediator can recognize and predict what learners need to be mediated on. Another advantage of uniform mediation is that all members of a group receive similar quantity and quality of mediation and by this the question of fairness in mediation is accounted for. Test fairness has always been one of the concerns of test developers.

For our decisions based on test scores to be fair all test conditions should be equal to learners. While mediating learners individually, there is a risk that some learners may extract more support from the mediator. In contrast, in group mediation, all receive exactly similar mediation through a similar mode of language (writing).

Another finding of this study was that the subjects could transcend their learning from a mediated test to an independent non-mediated test. This finding is consistent with Poehner and Lantolf (2010) that learners' "success in transcending their new abilities represents... an important indicator of the

extent to which they have benefitted from and internalized previously offered mediation"(p. 319). It also confirms Kozulin and Garb who found that "many of the students indeed benefitted from mediation and were able to apply the acquired strategies to the new text"(2002, p. 120). This finding implies that teaching reading through 'sauce' format mediation can, as well as improving learners' reading strategies, help learners perform well on the traditional non-mediated tests by resorting to their potential level of ability. Findings of this project support that 'sauce' format mediation, like any other mediation format, makes learners move from their ALD to their PLD. Then, teachers, by practicing reading through 'mediation boxes' in their classes, can prepare their students to perform well on novel and independent tests. However, this study was a small step towards investigating the impact of the new form of mediation suggested in this paper. To be more confident, more similar research is surely needed to be conducted.

Declaration of interest: none

References

- Ableeva, R. (2008). The effects of dynamic assessment on L2 listening comprehension. In J. P. Lantolf & M. E. Poehner (eds.), *Sociocultural theory and the teaching of second languages* (pp. 57-66). London: Equinox.
- Ackert, P., & Lee, L. (2005). *Concepts and comments*. Cengage Learning.
- Edwards, L. (2007). *Solutions Placement Test*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Feuerstein, R., R., J., Jensen, M. R., Kaniel, S., & Tzuriel, D. (1987). Prerequisites for assessing learning potential: The LAPD model. In C. S. Lidz (Ed.), *Dynamic Assessment: An interactional approach to evaluating learning potential* (pp. 35-51). New York: Guilford Press.
- Kozulin, A., & Garb E. (2002). Dynamic assessment of EFL text comprehension of at-risk students. *School Psychology International*, 23, 112–127.
- Lantolf, J. P. (Ed.). (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2004). Dynamic assessment: Bringing the past into the future. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1, 49–74.

- Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2010). Dynamic assessment in the classroom: Vygotskian praxis for second language development. *Language Teaching Research, 15*, 11-33.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *The sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Poehner, M. E. (2005). *Dynamic assessment of advanced L2 learners of French*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, USA.
- Poehner, M. E. (2008). *Dynamic assessment: A Vygotskian approach to understanding and promoting second language development*. Berlin: Springer Publishing.
- Poehner, M. E., & Lantolf, J. P. (2005). Dynamic assessment in the language classroom. *Language Teaching Research, 9*, 1-33.
- Poehner, M. E. (2007). Beyond the test: L2 dynamic assessment and the transcendence of mediated learning. *The Modern Language Journal, 91*, 323-340.
- Poehner, M. E., & Lantolf, J. P. (2010). 'Vygotsky's Teaching-Assessment Dialectic and L2 Education: The Case for Dynamic Assessment. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 17*, 312-330.
- Sternberg, R. J., & Grigorenko E. L. (2002). *Dynamic testing: The nature and measurement of learning potential*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Appendix

List of Reading Strategies Mediated in the Mediated Version of the Reading Posttest

Code	Strategy
1	Skimming the text for getting the gist and main ideas.
2	Guessing the meaning of unknown words from context (synonyms, antonyms).
3	Drawing inferences about the meanings of a word from context.
4	Weaving together ideas in the context.
5	Recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude, tone, and mood.
6	Following the structure of a passage.
7	Understanding explicitly stated information.
8	Understanding information when not explicitly stated.
9	Understanding relations within the sentence.
10	Understanding relations between parts of a text through lexical cohesion

-
- 11 Understanding relations between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion
 - 12 Distinguishing the main idea from supporting details.
 - 13 Extracting salient details to summarize (the text, an idea).
 - 14 Scanning the text to locate specifically required information (names, dates ...).
 - 15 Using knowledge of the world to decode an unfamiliar word.
 - 16 Using structural clues (grammatical function and morphology of the word to
 - 17 Using knowledge of syntax to understand the meaning of longer sentences, e. g.,
 - 18 Identifying and interpreting discourse markers.
 - 19 Recognizing text organization.
 - 20 Recognizing the presuppositions underlying the text.
 - 21 Recognizing implications and making inferences.
 - 22 Prediction.
 - 23 Identifying the purpose in Reading a text.
 - 24 Identifying paragraph structure.
 - 25 Identifying sentence structure.
 - 26 Identifying figurative language.
 - 27 Evaluating (Reading critically and assessing truth value of textual information).
 - 28 Identifying the cohesive elements and finding out what each refers to.
 - 29 Distinguishing between literal and implied meanings.
 - 30 Using lexical analysis (prefixes, roots, suffixes, etc.) to determine meaning.
-

Biodata

Ghorban Ahmadi holds PhD degree in TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch and is a faculty member of English Department at Islamic Azad University, Marand Branch. His main interest areas include Teaching Language Skills, Reading Pedagogy, Language Testing, and Dynamic Assessment. He has presented and published in several national and international conferences and journals.

Behrooz Azabdaftari is Emeritus Professor of English Language Teaching at the Islamic Azad University of Tabriz. His experience and knowledge of teaching and researching language are best represented by his publication of at least ten books and fifty articles related to language, literature and translation. His continuing interest has been on the exploration of aspects of Vygotsky's views. His recent publications include Golbang-e-Afiat and Language and Other Disciplines: Interdisciplinary Studies.

Seyyed Mohammad Alavi is a Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Language Department of English Language and Literature of University of Tehran. His main areas of research interest are language testing and assessment, Teacher assessment and Task based Language Teaching. He has published in national and international journals.

