



The Dynamic Assessment of Reading Comprehension: An Exploration of EFL Teachers' Perception and Practice

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates EFL teachers' perceptions regarding Dynamic Assessment (hereafter DA) prior and subsequent to taking part in workshops and panel discussions. Twenty-five EFL teachers participated in a semi-structured interview, 10 of whom were selected through purposive sampling to take part in a five-session workshop, which was held to familiarize them with the principles of DA. Following workshop training sessions, a panel discussion was run for two sessions and teachers shared their ideas and discussed their problems in applying DA in their classes regarding reading skill. Their classes were video-taped for further analysis and they were also asked to keep reflective journals regarding their practice. After these treatment sessions, a second semi-structured interview regarding EFL teachers' perceptions about DA was run. According to the results of the discussion sessions and interviews, using them as the base of work, an observation checklist was created to assess the EFL teachers' classroom practices and see whether they correspond to their attitudes or not. The results of this study showed that EFL teachers found workshop training sessions both informative and practical. They mentioned panel discussion groups as a good platform to discuss their practice-related problems with their colleagues and writing reflective journals as an awareness raising act which helps them improve their DA practices. Implications for teachers and teacher training courses are discussed.

Keywords: Dynamic Assessment, Static Assessment, EFL Teachers' Perception, Reflective Journals

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1. Introduction

In Iran, over many years, a chain of instructional guidelines has driven schoolteachers to implement a communicative learner-centered approach to teaching English in the classroom (Razmjoo, & Riazi, 2006; Zohrabi et al., 2012). Iranian EFL students' capability to read English fluently is prioritized by policymakers throughout all levels of education. As a consequence, the progress of Iranian students' reading comprehension skills has grown to be the principle concern of the academics who teach English in the classroom because in EFL settings like Iran, there is rare opportunities to interact in English (Shirbagi, 2010). Therefore, English as the medium of interaction is highlighted as most of the source course books or articles are in English. Rajablou and Shirvan (2017) indicate that the EFL context where Iranian students grow up is insufficiently supportive to permit them to read and speak English in everyday life and this can be one of the elements stifling their motivation for English learning. The teachers' knowledge and skill in assessing reading is also appeared as a challenge for administering constructive instruction and assessment (Birjandi et al., 2013).

Standardized traditional assessment is the dominant method in most English language classrooms in Iran and Static assessment (hereafter SA) is the medium to review what and how much learners have learned (Mojarrad et al, 2013). However, teachers, especially those who teach remedial courses, may consider the information derived from SA inadequate and not informative for future course of action. Alternative assessments are needed to allow those instructors to gain advantage of the diagnostic information about students who encounter learning problems, and to predict their students' future guides of action (Grigorenko & Sternberg, 1998; Tzuriel, 2000).

Studies have shown that assessment is not an easy task (Malone, 2008). Numerous instructive frameworks are endeavoring to reengineer and upgrade their assessment and testing strategies to fuse new methodologies and systems. Along these lines, instructors' knowledge of assessment or evaluation proficiency greatly affects the quality of education. For that reason, the notion of assessment literacy has introduced a nascent line of research in literature on assessment in Iran context. The concept of 'assessment literacy' has grown to be regularly occurring to refer to the variety of abilities and knowledge that a number of stakeholders need so as to address the new assessment system that we all are using these days. But, there is little settlement on what 'assessment literacy' might comprise, regardless of a growing diversity of processes which is supported by assessment literacy (for instance, Walters, 2010). Assessment literacy is "the possession of knowledge about the basic principles of sound assessment practice, including terminology, the development and use of assessment methodologies and techniques, familiarity with standards of quality in

assessment familiarity with alternative to traditional measurements of learning” (Malone, 2008 p. 24).

Teachers’ language assessment literacy regarding the new methods of assessment like DA, is quite underdeveloped in Iran (Ajideh et al., 2012). The teachers, who are well-equipped with contemporary theoretical perspectives and pedagogical practices mainly concerned with ‘what to teach, how to teach, find themselves in a rather unexplored domain when it comes to the assessment of learners’ language proficiency levels or their areas of strengths and weaknesses. Traditional types of teaching are gradually replaced with modern teaching methods (Nasiri & Khorshidi, 2015). In this light, there is a call for systematically and gradually familiarizing the teachers with dynamic assessment and its’ mechanism.

Considering the different features of DA, its nascent nature to assess language learning, and lack of Iranian EFL teachers’ literacy regarding the use of DA (Mardani, & Tavakoli, 2011) in their classrooms, the purpose of this study is to investigate Iranian EFL teachers’ perceptions and practices of DA in reading comprehension classes. With regard to the importance of comprehending teachers’ beliefs and whether they transfer their beliefs into instructional practices, especially in relation to DA implementation, there is a lack of comprehensive research in the context of Iran (Karimi, & Shafiee, 2014; Nasiri & Khorshidi, 2015). Hence, the purpose of the current study is to address this gap and discuss Iranian EFL teachers’ practices as well as beliefs of DA. This mixture of factors suggests a need to analyze and improve the instruction and assessment of Iranian students’ reading comprehension skills in the classroom context.

The current study is significant at two levels of theoretical, and empirical/ pedagogical values. This study is significant theoretically because based on the literature, DA is of paramount importance in language teaching which results in students’ academic success (Lantolf & Poehner, 2005). Many studies (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011) report that the findings from research in language teaching regarding the correspondence between teachers’ practices as well as beliefs have been contradictory. Many studies (Hill & Sabet, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011; Poehner, 2005; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005) illustrated the positive influence DA has on instruction and manifested that the process was leading to a fast internalization of new language features. Regarding the significance of this study considering its empirical/ pedagogical values, this study is valuable as the findings may enhance EFL teachers’ DA beliefs and their practices through awareness-raising. Hence, there is a need to reveal the current issue in various contexts and situations. In the domain of assessment, recently, the focus has been

shifted to alternative assessment like self-assessment, peer assessment as well as DA.

The goal of the study is to provide an insight into perception and practices of Iranian EFL teachers regarding DA in private language institute in Iran, by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the EFL teachers' perceptions regarding DA and its implementation prior and subsequent to participating in the workshops and panel discussions?
2. How do EFL teachers learn about DA by writing a set of reflective testing journals on the basis of their actual language assessment class practices?
3. To what extent do Iranian private language institutes' EFL teachers' DA perceptions and instructional practices correspond?

2. Literature Review

Sociocultural theory (hereafter SCT), which is proposed by Vygotsky (1978), states that our world and our thoughts are merged together and are not separated. He then added that being social is in the nature of human development (Vygotsky, 1978). All functions in the culture first emerges between people as an inter-psychological one, then as an intra-psychological category (Vygotsky, 1986). Consequently, the results of an individual development are here basically entangled to social life (Vygotsky, 1984).

2.1. The Sociocultural (SCT) Perspective on Human Development

Based on Vygotsky's idea (1978, 1987), people and the world does not have a direct but a mediated relationship: the relationship between stimulus and response is mediated by way of equipment. This perspective is at odd with a behaviorist model (Poehner, 2007), which show that behaviors are the result of thought, and thought can be measured by one's behavior.

In SCT, people depend on labor activity and equipment, which consist of symbolic equipment, to mediate and adjust their relationships with others in the society and even with themselves. The essential difference among people and animals is that human beings can respond to stimuli they create, which people to take responsibility for their personal action. Speech performs a completely one of a kind role in the system of intellectual development. Thought differs from speech in many different ways such as shape and function (Vygotsky, 1978).

In Vygotsky (1978, 1987), development and learning are interwoven and they are impossible to be away from its context. The cultural context establishes the kind of cognitive approaches that pop up. Because of

this, Vygotsky (1986) believes that learning is able to result in improvement. The interaction a child has with his social context help him to develop. Their movements on gadgets are essential to improvement when they are covered in a context which is a social one and are mediated by means of conversation. Therefore, appropriation of cultural understanding performs an important position in cognitive improvement of children. The kid's competence is as precious for determining their cognitive condition as impartial overall competence. Hence, SCT is not the same as Piaget's (1959) outlook on people improvement, who believes that cognitive improvement has a generic source separated from the child's cultural environment. Education is powerful only when improvement has come about, or the child has advanced the cognitive ability to study, said Piaget. Information derives from cross-cultural studies also supports Vygotsky's ideas (Cole, 2002; Kozulin, 1998).

2.2. Tools for DA

In the context of L2 teaching, two main tools can be used to expedite learning during the application of DA, the first one is the scaffolding approach as the interaction between the mediator and learners in which new concepts are made, and (2) the application of tutoring, which is addressed as a communication with an auto-evaluation performance. Two main techniques are used to implement DA and those are 'scaffolding technique and learner reciprocity.

The technique of scaffolding is based on the zone of proximal development (hereafter ZPD). It is a tool for receiving mediation. The teacher provides support via the same activity of participants through the use of instructions and clues. The mediator takes away his / her support little by little as the learner's need for support decreases. Scaffolding is important for the creation of the ZPD (Wood & al, 1976). The writers describe scaffolding as a shared interaction process in which teachers first evaluate the amount of competence of the participants and think of the types of assistance. They then will become responsible for some not all segments of the activity that go above the students ' current stage of competence, prepare enough help and gradually provide less support.

In activities comprised of mediation and scaffolding, a successful ZPD takes place when a dialogical negotiation is formed. According to Poehner, "the mediators must adjust their interactions in order to remain sensitive to the needs of the learner "(Poehner, 2008, p. 85).

2.3. Key-Concepts in SCT

There are some concepts in SCT which are essential to fully understand it. The most important ones are: genetic domains, the

development of psychological tools, lower and higher mental functions, and ZPD.

ZPD is a function, which is continuously changing. It is both static and dynamic. It metamorphose as the kid receives a higher degree of thinking and comprehension. It includes a chain of continuously changing zones. With every shift, the functionality for learning greater ideas and abilities develops. ZPD is different for every single human being and asks for a different level of it at different form of aid. Based on the present ability of the learner it can predict the future course of action of the learner. In addition, the studying does no longer arise routinely after the development, but is related to the development. The emphasis is not on how the child became what she is these days, but on what she has been through to become what she is today.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

As the purpose of this study was to reach an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon that is DA, a sampling information-rich paradigm was followed. To this end, in the first phase of the study, 25 EFL teachers and in the second phase of the study 10 EFL teachers residing in Karaj who were more eager and if possible more experienced were selected. The participants of this study were selected through criterion sampling type of purposive sampling. The criteria for sample selection were holding M.A. or Ph.D. degrees both male and female in language teaching or applied linguistics and the minimum two years of teaching experience. Furthermore, the researcher limited the teacher selection to those currently teaching pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. The focus was on EFL teachers at private language institutes; EFL teachers at schools and universities fall outside the scope of this study.

All the teachers were of Iranian nationality and native speakers of Farsi. They were selected among both male and female teachers who had shown interest in the participation in this study. Their age range was from 25-40.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

In this research, a semi-structured in-depth interview, panel discussion, and workshop training were used regarding teachers' perceptions toward DA and its application. Furthermore, in order to assess teachers' practice in the classroom context, an observation scale was designed and used.

3.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

To explore teachers' beliefs before and after taking part in workshop sessions, the researcher utilized two semi-structured in-depth interview which was designed based on the literature review on DA and the major themes mentioned in Lantolf and Poehner (2005) and Lantolf (2009). The first set of interview questions explored Iranian EFL teachers' general perceptions on DA application before workshop training. It had 23 questions regarding different aspects and issues of DA. The second set of interview questions which was applied after workshop sessions consisted of 15 questions. The questions investigated in- depth DA related concepts and EFL teachers' perceptions about the appropriateness of workshop training sessions and panel discussions.

3.2.2. Assessor Training Workshop

A five-session training workshop was held for the selected participants. In this assessor training workshop different fundamental and recent issues about language testing and assessment were presented, discussed, challenged, and negotiated. The researcher used cutting edge articles (Davin, 2013; Lantolf, & Poehner, 2011; Lidz, & Elliott, 2000; Meihami, & Meihami, 2014; Poehner, 2007; Poehner, 2008; Poehner, 2009; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005) regarding DA and its applications in classroom to familiarize the teachers with the theoretical basis and practices of DA. The researcher used PowerPoint slides and handouts for addressing different issues of language assessment. Furthermore, the teachers could follow up their learning by concentrating on a set of tasks designed by the researcher at the end of each session. In order to consolidate, relevant tasks for each testing or assessment session were designed and the teachers used their knowledge to complete the tasks.

3.2.3. Reflective Testing Journals

The teachers were expected to keep a journal and reflect upon how they put their theory-based knowledge into practice. This started as soon as they begin participating in the workshop. Many teachers had experience in writing about their teaching practices, but they needed to acquire a reflective approach in order to evaluate their classroom-based testing practices and experiences thoroughly.

In context of the current study, the researcher utilized reflective journals in order to make the participants reflect on their performance when they apply DA in their classrooms. Utilizing reflective journals to write about their very own experience helped teachers to find out about their strengths and weaknesses regarding applying DA in their classrooms. Their experiences and sometimes the conversations they had with their students

were directly quoted for further analysis. Furthermore, it raised their awareness of what is happening in classroom and what should be done to increase learner cooperation while conducting DA. Finally, they could measure their own progress in applying DA by writing reflective journals regularly, getting feedback from their students, and reviewing what was going on.

3.2.4. Panel Discussion Groups

After the workshop, the teachers were requested to participate in panel discussions to comment on the quality of workshops, what they had learned, and how they could implement them effectively in the classroom. The teachers played an active role in a set of panel discussions set by the researcher in order to directly link what they learned in the workshop to their classroom-based practices, especially in regard to the issue of assessment.

3.2.5. Observation Checklist

An observation checklist was designed based on the interview questions, reflective testing journals, and the recurrent themes extracted from them. This check list was designed based on the interview questions and reflective testing journals.

3.3. Procedure

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative research method was adopted. This study was conducted over an eight-month period. The researchers started their work by sample selection based on the aforementioned criteria in the participants' section.

Then, in order to investigate the teachers' beliefs and knowledge about the DA, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the teachers. A semi-structured interview consisting of 23 questions, adopted from Lantolf and Poehner (2005) and Lantolf (2009), was used. After selecting the interview questions, three experts checked the credibility (validity) of the content. Furthermore, it was administered to 8 participants in the pilot phase to check the dependability (reliability) of the interview questions.

Next the workshop was held to familiarize the teachers with the principles of the DA and the ways to use them in the classroom. Moreover, the most recent research findings about the application of DA in different areas of language teaching were presented. In these workshops, the subjects were presented a series of tasks to practice DA. After completion of the workshop sessions, the participants were requested to take part in two sessions to discuss the issues they had learned as well as their own conception of DA and the ways to implement it in the classroom. These two sessions were recorded for in-depth analysis. However, prior to the session,

the subjects were first interviewed. The semi-structured interview lasted 30-45 minutes per participant. The researcher only intervened if and as needed to modify, clarify or help the participant elaborate on the questions. All the interviews were audio-video recorded for further reference and analysis. Furthermore, the interviewer transcribed the recorded interviews and conducted a content analysis. Then, the recurrent themes were organized and coded accordingly. Finally, the results were reported in frequency format.

During the process, 10 intermediate classes were audio and video taped for 10 sessions to monitor teachers' way of teaching reading skill in the classroom. After that the data were kept to be compared with the data after treatment sessions. According to the results of the discussion sessions and interviews, using them as the base of work, an observation checklist was created to assess the EFL teachers' classroom practices and see whether they correspond to their attitudes or not.

Ten sessions of the teachers' classes were observed to see how they applied. In this study, the observation was a non-participant one. As the observer used a checklist, this observation was more objective in contrast with subjective observations in which the researchers include their own particular judgments and view of the issue. In addition, the sessions were video-audio taped for further investigation of observation part. Furthermore, teachers were requested to write reflective journals regarding their application DA in their reading comprehension classes. They wrote about their actual experiences and how they helped their learners improve their reading comprehension

3.4. Data Analysis

To answer the first research question considering EFL teachers' perceptions of DA implementation in their classrooms, the researchers extracted the main themes mentioned in observation check lists. The data then was coded and reported in frequency format. Almost the same interview was used after the treatment and implementation of DA to see how teachers' beliefs and perception regarding DA has changed.

To answer the second research question regarding reflective testing journals and panel discussion participation, the researchers also extracted the main themes revealed in testing journals and discussions. After that the data was coded and reported in frequency. In order to answer the third research question chi-square was run to see if there is any correspondence between teachers' belief and their practices.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

In order to find out EFL teachers' overall understanding regarding DA, a set of interview questions was used. The demographics information regarding the participants of this phase is presented.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants of the First Phase of the Study

Item	Frequency							
Gender	Male	11	Female	14				
Age range	25-40	17	30-40	8				
Teaching experience	1-4	2	4-8	4	8-12	15	12 and above	4
Educational degree	BA	0	MA	21	Ph.D.	4		

Twenty-three questions were posed and the answers were recorded for further analysis. The main themes of the questions evolved around their familiarity with DA, its applicability with an individual or in groups, its sensitivity to learner's age, its usefulness in different skills and at different levels, if it is applicable for high-stake examination or not, their overall evaluation of DA, if the mediation should be from teacher or more capable peer, at what level DA works better, if first or second language should be used for mediation, if DA or SA is easier for scoring, if it is plausible in terms of time and effort, the purpose for using it, if it improves learners' motivation or not and if it is common in Iran or not.

Teachers did not have much information about DA, and those who did were vaguely aware of what they were doing in their classes. They preferred not to use DA in their classes due to lack of time, support on the part of both policy makers and students, and their own lack of knowledge. Those few numbers of participants who had academic background in DA, and had some papers published on DA referred their reluctance to practice DA to Iranian's culture. They believed the infrastructure for using DA is not ready for Iranian students and that DA should be applied much earlier if any improvement in assessment is pursued.

With regard to the sensitivity of the type of assessment to age of the learners, most of the teachers (88%) indicated that DA is more sensitive and it is better to be practiced with youngsters because young learners are less

experienced and they have larger ZPD comparing to adults and they need more help from teacher side. As youngsters grow independently thorough the correct type and amount of mediations, the amount of help they need to perform the same task decreases to a great extent.

Teachers were mainly fond of using DA in all four skills, although speaking and reading were preferred. They mostly believed DA should be done by teachers because students believe in teachers more than others and the teacher is familiar with every students' needs and can help them better. There is a controversy on using first or second language or both of them for mediation. 18 teachers believed that the combination of first and second languages is better because it increases learning process speed. It is found that using first language is appropriated as it leads to better understanding and decrease cognitive load. Hence, using both first and second language is suggested because they can be used in different situations in order to improve learning process.

Many factors, such as amount of effort, increasing motivation and autonomy of learners, ease of scoring; to name a few, were mentioned as the reasons for using DA. As it was mentioned earlier teachers lack of knowledge and Iranians' culture dissuaded them form applying it in their everyday teaching though.

The second research question investigated writing reflective journal in developing EFL teachers' perceptions regarding DA and its application in reading comprehension classrooms. Like the themes extracted from workshop and discussion panels, themes are extracted from teachers' reflective journals, which are provided below.

All in all, teachers believe that learners in this study are not familiar with concept of co-learning. They seem not to like it when they all learn something together. They do not like to be assessed together. They are not fond of helping the weak. The researchers believe that DA could be applied from their primary school time in all their courses. Knowing the aim of DA and how beneficial it could be for all of them will make them lend themselves to the teacher and the class more than before. In terms of reading comprehension DA works better in comparison with all the other skills because they have something to look back and to work on. They accept help better when it is combined with their visual ability.

The reasons such as lacking English knowledge, low background knowledge, lack of interest, personal bias which causes misinterpreting the underlying meaning make a reading text difficult to understand. It is implied that applying dynamic assessment in language classes specifically in reading skill in settings like Iran might work as follows:

In closed societies like Iran in which most learners do not have intrinsic motivation to learn the language, incentive and prestige are almost the only thing to keep them motivated, teachers are not expert at teaching the language and culturally and politically people are not taught to think critically (Torabi, et al), in other words; they don't care much of learning and they are not interested in facts, they prefer not to think and deny their own bias. As (Peter, 1992) believes “there is significant correlation between critical thinking and reading comprehension, improvement in one is paralleled by improvement in the other”. In this kind of culture higher order thinking skills (analyzing, evaluating and creating) which require more cognitive load, is less encouraged. People generally use lower order thinking skills. Considering all these conditions, first, in classes with average or high English knowledge and world knowledge, applying DA is considerably useful and in the long run it can result in great improvement.

Secondly, teachers unanimously believe that boys can get to the point easier because they were brought up in more open world than girls. So, their general knowledge is better than girls and DA can work better on them. And finally, to apply DA in classes effectively the education system needs to be revolutionized and sensible measures need to be taken, otherwise with the current education policy applying DA is merely time and energy consuming for both students and teachers.

Table 2

Patterns Extracted from Interview and Observation Check List: Chi-Square Statistics

	Observation
Chi-Square	.517 ^a
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.772

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.

In order to answer the third question, an observation checklist was prepared based on the interview results and then observing the video-recorded classes, the presence/absence of each item in each teacher's class was calculated using frequency counts. Then in order to see if there is any correspondence between what teachers said and what they did in their classrooms, a Chi-square test was run. It was run to see whether there was any statistically significant difference between the observed and expected values. Table 2 presents the results of the Chi-Square test comparing the expected with observed values. Here, the discrepancy is not big and not statistically significant (Sig. = .77). The chi-square goodness-of-fit test shows that there was no significant difference in the proportion of DA levels

(teachers' general knowledge of DA, mediation for reading comprehension, and effect of DA on learners) identified in the observations as compared with the ones obtained from the interview data ($X^2 = .51$, $df = 2$, $p < .77$). In other words, there was correspondence between the number of times different DA levels in the form of grand themes (Table 2) appeared in the interview sessions and their actual occurrences in the observed classrooms.

4.2. Discussion

Static assessment is a reliable way of assessing students which make use of the percentile rank to compare students with each other, but as one of its deficiencies, it cannot measure ones' potential ability (Nazari & Mansoori, 2014). SA is used in Iran during decades because of legislative requirements but the point to mention is that assessment should increase the students' learning and pay attention to learners' potentials not just measuring what one can do in a fixed time because many things affect the person's performance when taking the exam such as fatigue, inappropriate environmental situation and anxiety (Birjandi, & Alemi, 2010; Phakiti, 2003).

Most of the teachers mentioned that they were conscious while applying DA in class but some of them declared lack of awareness regarding DA application in class. The degree of consciousness can be related to the teachers' knowledge of DA, its theories and principles. This is in line with the studies like Lidz (1991) who stated that the more a teacher knows about DA, the more she becomes conscious and can work through it and apply it efficiently.

With regard to the sensitivity of the type of assessment to age of the learners, most of the teachers (%88) indicated that DA is more sensitive and it is better to be practiced with youngsters because young learners are less experienced in learning and have larger ZPD compared with adults and they need more help from teacher side (Fuchs et al., 2011; Tzuriel, 2001). Others stated that SA is more sensitive to EFL learners' age. It seems that they may not have enough knowledge or misunderstood the interview question. However, this finding that SA is sensitive to age is in contrast with the results of studies done by Burns (1985) and Camilleri and Bitting (2013).

Studies have shown that DA can be used with learners of different age, ability, and proficiency level (Elliot, 2003). In spite of such a finding, some studies showed that DA is more efficient with beginners because they have large ZPDS, are less experienced and need more help from teacher side in order to reach their potentials (Coyne & Harn, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2011). Considering the use of DA for advanced learners, it was found that it can be used to reduce learners' anxiety (Anton, 2009; Poehner, 2005). All groups of

learners and mainly intermediate levels can take advantage of DA as it increases learner's motivation.

It is approved that DA can result in long term learning because it makes use of intervention and meaningful communication during mediation (Kalyuga & Sweller, 2005). Teachers in this study had similar attitudes regarding the long- term effect of DA on students' learning. They explained that this long- term effect is because DA involves learners in the process of learning, help in internalizing the skills, improve cognitive development, and uses meaningful activities for mediation. These are found in other studies (Kozulin & Presseisen, 1995; Poehner, 2007; Tzurriel & Kaufman, 1999), too.

DA has the potential to be done both with groups and with individual. Group DA is a type of DA in which the teacher helps learners and mediate whenever needed (Poehner, 2009). The participants of this study believed that it is possible to use DA in groups and save time and energy. This approves the previous findings on the applicability and advantages of GDA (Alavi et al., 2011; Davin, 2011). Some of the teachers disagreed and stated that it is better to do DA individually because learners have different needs, potentials, and abilities. This finding is logical as well because learners vary very much from one to the other in terms of whether they prefer to learn in group or individually (Lidz & Marine, 2001; Poehner, 2008). Furthermore, they believed that DA is more effective if used with small groups. Small groups are preferred because it is time- consuming and manageable (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005), mediation is easier and the teacher can concentrate on each individual performance.

DA can be used to teach and assess all language skills like speaking, writing, reading, and listening. However, the participants of this study were fonder of using DA in assessing speaking skill more than other skills. Speaking skill is highlighted by other researchers too (Anton, 2013; Hill & Sabet, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2005). The second skill was found to be listening (Ableeva, 2008; Hidri, 2014), and then reading was mentioned (Birjandi et al., 2013; Dorfler et al., 2009; Naeini & Duvall, 2012; Swanson & Howard, 2005).

Considering the help while doing DA, it is accepted that both teacher and more proficient learners can help the one who needs help (Xiaoxiao & Yan, 2010). Help form teacher is more preferred as students can trust teacher more than other peers. This is consistent with the finding of Davin and Donato (2013) and Poehner and Lantolf (2005). However, three teachers believed that students can receive help from their more proficient friends as they are comfortable doing so. This is in line with the findings of Kozulin and Garb (2002) and Poehner (2008).

Considering all the positive effects of DA, when it comes to practice, teachers feel that it is not plausible in terms of teacher time and effort. It is demanding in case of teachers' knowledge of how to apply it in classroom and how to manage the time for it. Hence, teachers stated that it is better to use the combination of SA and DA in order to increase students' learning. DA can be used as a complementary type of assessment in the classroom to increase learner autonomy (Poehner, 2007) and for learning purposes and scoring ones (Kozulin & Garb, 2002). Moreover, use of DA can lead to high learner motivation. DA has proved its usefulness in increasing learners' motivation (Leung, 2007; Zoghi & Malmeer, 2013). DA was mentioned to be the fair type of assessment. This is in agreement with what Poehner (2011) and Poehner and Rea- Dickins (2014) said about dynamic assessment.

After interview on the related topics, the teachers believed that there are many problems considering the use of SA. The most frequent ones were lack of learners' ability to develop knowledge, lack of teachers' ability to engage learners, emphasis on the product of learning, not recognizing learners' potential abilities and not training independent problem solver, and objective scoring. These items are indicated in other researchers' studies regarding the problems of SA (Burton, & Watkins, 2007).

There are some factors hindering the process of DA. They mostly mentioned one is lack of teacher's knowledge on how to apply DA in classroom which approves the findings of (Karpov, & Tzuriel, 2009), the appropriate time to help learners (Poehner, & Lantolf, 2005), students' different proficiency levels (Ajideh, & Nourdad, 2012), number of students per class (Elliott, 2003), learners' lack of interest to take part in DA process, and institutions' policies (Haywood & Tzuriel, 2002). As Hamilton (2014) endorses, "Programme teams are finding it challenging to move away from examination-based practices, constrained by institutional culture, lengthy regulatory frameworks and lack of training" (Hamilton, 2014, p. 20). The items can be controlled by increasing teachers' knowledge about DA and making institutions' policies more flexible in this regard.

Teacher who took part in the workshops believed that L2 should be the medium of instruction and assessment in classes using DA and L1 should be used when necessary for better comprehension. As language is open and flexible, assessment should have open boundaries and be open to different definition (Shohamy, 2006). This type of test can be created by incorporating various forms of expression and opportunities to convey nuanced meanings, humor, metaphorical use of language and symbolic skills, among other things (Kramsch, 2004).

With regard to the short- term effects of DA, DA can provide less-threatening learning environments, motivate learners, and as they receive

feedback they can perform better. Moreover, DA has some long-term effects, too. It leads to learner independence (Poehner, 2007), learners become more conscious of their learning, and acts as a motivator.

The 10 teachers in this study, wrote reflective journals regarding how they applied DA in their classroom every session. Due to the focus of the study problems relating to reading skills are mentioned. The teachers who wrote reflective journals of each session mentioned problems in their classes and how they solved them. Some of them provided examples of interaction between teacher and students the purpose of which was to help learner understand the problematic area. They mentioned that students had difficulty in finding meaning of new words while reading and the teacher helped them by providing hints like “Guess by context, and relating the word to another word in the text, dividing the word into their roots, providing examples, part of speech, elicitation questions, hints, defining difficult words in the text, word roots, intonation” or they had problem finding headline and main idea of the text. Again, the teacher helped them by asking them to look for key words. The purpose of DA is to push the learner’s abilities forward, to the extent that the aim is achieved, the validity of the procedure is established... Feuerstein, Rand and Rynders (1988, p. 205) believed that in DA almost no attention is assigned to product. The focus is attached to learning about the process rather than the product.’ (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004, p. 67). This finding is in line with the findings of McKeown et al. (2009) who showed the effectiveness of teaching reading strategies on learners’ reading comprehension.

During mediation sessions, based on their journals, teachers were found to be the best source of help because learners did not trust their peers. This finding can be justified because most of the time, students are afraid of requesting for help from their classmates or they may feel humiliated if they ask. Students consider teacher as the most trustworthy and knowledgeable one who can help them progress. This finding concurs with the finding of Davin and Donato (2013) who pointed to teacher as the reliable source of help in the classroom.

Considering application of DA in reading classrooms, teachers used student feedback for determining the type and amount of mediation. This is also reflected in the study of Shrestha and Coffin (2012) who regarded student feedback and progress as the best source of finding best mediation types. Furthermore, they stated that learners’ motivation and interest in class participation increased and the class environment was comfortable and productive. L1 was used when comprehension was blocked. Furthermore, in the examples provided by one teacher they pointed to the notion of transfer of learning using DA in reading comprehension. It was seen that S1 successfully applied what was shown during the first intervention, revealing a transfer of

learning which can be called near transfer. Near transfer “involve(s) the principles learned originally but in different combinations” as opposed to far transfer, which comprises a little creativity, which “involve(s) no transformations” in an activity (Brown & Campione, 1990, p. 152). Indicators of transfer are indicators of learning and while “transfer tasks differ in degree of similarity... [They] require the same underlying skills and abilities” (Toglia & Cermak, 2009, p. 571, in reference to Toglia, 2005). This may also be a proof for Skillen’s (2008) argument regarding “the construction zone”. He argues that the ZPD is just one stage ahead of one's position and that a beginner may not think of generating a variety of possible solutions before embarking on a single approach to a task, while a more professional student could (Skillen, 2008).

5. Conclusion and Implications

The findings in the present study revealed variations in Iranian ELT teachers' perceptions regarding DA prior and subsequent to taking part in DA related workshop and panel discussions. These results illustrated empirical support for the sociocultural impacts of education on the application of DA that contradicts the traditional SA system (Nazari, 2017). The undemocratic effects of such an evaluation system does not take into account the results of the assessment, the knowledge being received and the teachers who develop the tests. Teachers are like slaves who have the responsibility of passing the information just like a robot (Shohamy, 2005).

They all believed that DA is a more logical tool to clarify learners' style of learning. However, they did not agree on the method to collect the required data. Based on the data it was found out that the literature is in line with the findings that DA is more effective in classrooms. There was not, unfortunately, any kinds of professional literature about the way to put the feelings and struggles into practice.

All 10 teachers in the focus group stated the reason they implement DA was because they aim to help students progress and comprehend the lesson better. The results from analysis of the focus groups indicated that teachers considered DA more deeply and their perceptions of DA changed over time. According to Fullan et al. (2005), continuous improvement is required for change process. Since the researchers worked to overcome the limits of a system change with the implementation of a DA, they also worked to make sure that teachers were supported and owned by institution-wide and individual supports.

One can individually grow when one can build capacity in a school to maintain the practice before the phases of implementation. Every teacher recognized the importance and practicality of workshop training and panel

discussion groups. Fullan (2001) said that working together entire systems can increase the group's capacity. Every teacher in this study showed their own set. Each teacher presented their own strengths and areas for improvement in this study. Identifying the needed areas would advocate the belief that constant change will allow teachers to grow and gain more experience in their job.

In the present study, the pre-post DA research abled the researcher to consider the institute system as a whole and break it down by piece by piece afterward, if necessary. Knowing where an institute is in their understanding of DA, was a starting point to embark on individual growth.

Since the Alliance for Excellent Education (2011) reported the change in expectations for both students and teachers, the researcher believes that educators need to ask for more from students in a complex but possible way. The researcher recommend that L2 teachers shifts from SA to alternative assessment rather smoothly. The shift requires higher order thinking, communication and accountability. Mandell (1999), Poehner and van Compernelle (2011), Sidek (2012), and Tamjid and Birjandi (2011) suggested alternative assessment methods because they believed it can measure students' achievement far more concise. This researcher focused on DA so that he could ask students to explain, create, and write more. This researcher's suggestion for teachers today is to create a more communicative L2 classroom, as communication promotes higher-order thinking, greater commitment and personal responsibility, and provides realistic learning and growth opportunities (Burksaitienė & Teresevičienė, 2008; Riedinger, 2006). The creation of alternative evaluations can influence the skills of the L2 teacher positively and is strongly supported by this researcher.

During the interview the learners indirectly mentioned the hinders to the practicing of DA in private language sectors. For instance, they pinpointed the following: institutions' policies, lack of EFL teachers' knowledge of DA and the need to be educated in this field, the need to see examples of DA, the requirement of more time and engagement from students, the requirement of private time with the student, and finally issues of fairness in assessment.

In order to help solve the above problems, we should ensure that certain measures are taken. For example, we should liberalize the policies of institutions, universities and schools so that teachers can carry out dynamic evaluations. Too positivistically concerned with validity and reliability issues. Teaching and evaluation hours in institutions / schools must be redistributed by, for example, less teaching and more evaluation-as-learning. A slow but constant development is what teachers need, because as Guskey (2000, p. 4) states, "One constant finding in the research literature is that

notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development.”

The results of this study have implications for other school districts and government policy and educational initiatives. One of the most important qualities that was derived out of this study is the ability to measure one's achievement and certainly announce if the learner has achieved what he was supposed to grasp or not. The goal of this study was to put teacher's perception of DA on the same line as their application of DA in the classroom.

The size of the study was not very big and approach adopted was based on qualitative analysis. Both teachers and learners were non-native English speakers, therefore it would be a novel thing to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between native and non-natives teachers and learners. Since teacher learning and cognition are conditioned conceptually and contextually (Borg, 2006), what they believe in during the years of teaching experience changes in the initial stages of their teaching career. As teachers become more experienced, even existing beliefs have different manifestations (Borg, 2006). It is recommended that longitudinal case studies and ethnographic studies shed more light on the effects of experience and education on the perceptions of individual teachers about DA. Finally, as Duff (2008) states, the repetition of studies with a data-driven nature, like this one, generates more evidence in different contexts to validate the findings. Finally, it is of great importance to extend the case studies to other zones beyond one institute in a follow-up study. Nuances often occur in a specific school that is unique only in that location. The ability to carry out the same study in another environment with other teachers with similar support help strengthen the reliability of the dynamic evaluation perception survey and validate the generalizability of studies to other environments beyond this specific language institute.

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