

**Research Article**

# Beyond the Red Pen: Using Dynamic Assessment to Mediate Writing Mechanics Issues among ESL Learners

Aakash Kumar<sup>1\*</sup> , William H. Rupley<sup>1</sup> , Debra McKeown<sup>1</sup> , Hassan Syed<sup>2</sup>  and David Paige<sup>3</sup> <sup>1</sup> Department of Teaching, learning, and Culture, Texas A&M University, Texas, United States of America<sup>2</sup> Department of Education, Sukkur IBA University, Sukkur, Pakistan<sup>3</sup> Department of Education, Northern Illinois University, Illinois, United States of America

\* **Corresponding author:** Aakash Kumar, Department of Teaching, learning, and Culture, Texas A&M University, Texas, United States of America. Email: aakumar@tamu.edu

**ARTICLE INFO****Article History:**

Received: 24/10/2023

Revised: 14/11/2023

Accepted: 21/11/2023

Published: 25/12/2023

**Keywords:**

Dynamic assessment

ESL classroom

Static assessment

Writing mechanics

**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** Dynamic assessment has demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing writing skills among ESL learners and may be especially useful in the improvement of writing mechanics by enabling individualized mediation and adaptive instruction. The major objectives of the current study were to examine the effectiveness of dynamic assessment in reducing writing mechanics errors among Pakistani learners in their essay drafts. The study also explored how experimental group students perceive the mediational intervention and dynamic assessment as an alternative approach to static assessment in improving writing mechanics.

**Methodology:** To perform the study, a sequential explanatory design was used to explore the effect of dynamic assessment instruction on Pakistani ESL learners' writing mechanics. The sequential explanatory design allowed us to understand the phenomenon under study more comprehensively by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in sequence. The quantitative part of the study used an interventionist model, with a pretest-treatment-posttest design, while the qualitative part used semi-structured interviews. Following a quantitative test of the efficacy of treatment, the researchers interviewed the participants of the experimental group to investigate their perceptions of the mediation approach. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for recurring themes and sub-themes.

**Results:** The quantitative findings of this study confirmed the significant impact of dynamic assessment and were consistent with previous research reporting it as an effective approach to improving writing skills. Regarding the qualitative findings, dynamic assessment positively affected students' writing mechanics. Students reported that dynamic assessment could reduce writing anxiety, enhance self-efficacy, and provide ample opportunities to learn from their errors.

**Conclusion:** The findings of the current study showed that the interaction between teachers and students during mediation significantly contributed to their writing development and helped them work toward self-regulation.

## 1. Introduction

The mastery of English writing skills is a complex task that involves multifaceted understandings that necessitate a comprehensive instructional and evaluative approach (Leijten & Van Waes, 2013). This complexity is further magnified for individuals acquiring English as a Second Language (ESL), as the disparities in grammatical structures and vocabulary between their native language and English present challenges to written communication

(Zhang, 2018). Notably, ESL learners encounter difficulties grasping the intricacies of English writing, particularly in terms of writing mechanics. Such fundamental skills essential for effective writing encompass the accurate use of syntax and semantics, including tenses, sentence structure, vocabulary, articles, pronouns, and grammar (Matsuda & Tardy, 2017). The inadequate incorporation of these syntactic and semantic

► *Cite this paper as:* Kumar A, Rupley WH, McKeown D, Syed H, Paige D. Beyond the Red Pen: Using Dynamic Assessment to Mediate Writing Mechanics Issues among ESL Learners. Journal of Contemporary Language Research. 2023; 2(4): 171-180. DOI: 10.58803/jclr.v2i4.89



The Author(s). Published by Rovedar. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

features results in writing that is challenging to comprehend and leads to difficulty in comprehending the intended message (Cho, 2018).

Unlike traditional static assessments that merely measure existing skills, dynamic assessment (DA) actively engages learners in a collaborative process, allowing targeted scaffolding to support writing skill development (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). In the context of ESL writing mechanics, DA could involve diagnostic tasks, feedback loops, and interactive interventions that address specific linguistic challenges faced by individual learners. Thus, writing instruction aims to address the unique linguistic needs of each student.

English is the official language of Pakistan; thus, considerable emphasis is placed on achieving proficiency in both speaking and writing. In Pakistan, despite efforts to promote writing as a process, the evaluation of writing often focuses solely on the final product through static assessment (SA) methods. These methods rely on standardized responses and predetermined criteria, lacking targeted support for individual needs (Bukhari & Mahmood, 2017). Consequently, there exists a notable gap in ESL students' understanding of their writing abilities and areas requiring improvement, impeding their development of effective written communication skills in English (Imran & Abbas, 2019). To address this issue, ESL students need specific feedback tailored to their writing difficulties (Sarwar, 2019; Uddin & Akhtar, 2020).

Dynamic assessment (DA) has emerged as an effective approach to support writing development (Xian, 2020). Emerging from Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (SCT), DA emphasizes learning by considering students' prior knowledge, learning potential, and individual needs (Lantolf, 2011). Integration of both assessment and instruction DA enables a collaborative and dialogic approach, creating a supportive learning environment that is particularly effective in addressing struggles with writing mechanics faced by ESL students in Pakistan (Rashidi & Bahadori Nejad, 2018).

### 1.1. Dynamic assessment

Drawing on Sociocultural Theory (SCT), DA blends assessment and instruction, emphasizing the dynamic nature of the assessment process and its mediating role in learning (Poehner & Wang, 2021). It challenges the widely held belief that teacher-student interaction during assessment undermines the validity of the process. Instead, when using DA, the teacher guides the student's performance during the assessment by analyzing the required level and type of support. Beginning with implicit assistance, the teacher gradually transitions to explicit assistance (Kazemi et al., 2020). This shift from dependency on others to autonomy is founded on the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is defined as a journey between what a student can accomplish with assistance and what they can achieve independently (Patang & Machmoed, 2020). The theory posits that every student has inherent abilities and prior knowledge that form the basis for their

present interactions and gradually shape their future mental development (Jaramillo, 1996).

The objective of teacher assistance is to scaffold the development of independent and proficient learners (Gupta, 2009). According to Lantolf et al. (2015), what students can achieve with the help of others becomes what they will eventually accomplish on their own. The degree of their current development establishes the groundwork for their potential future progress, which can be achieved through personalized, gradually reduced mediation (i.e., dialogic), tailored to students' ZPD and responsiveness (Xi & Lantolf, 2021). Mediation is only provided as necessary and withdrawn once the student demonstrates self-regulation (Alkhudiry, 2022).

### 1.2. Writing mechanics in English as a second language writing

Effective writing mechanics are fundamental components to accomplishing clear communication in written texts (Husna, 2017). These mechanics include tense, subject-verb agreement, pronoun use, articles, prepositions, conditionals, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling (Darus & Ching, 2009). In an ESL context, students often encounter a variety of irregularities in the English language, which creates many communication difficulties for them (Khoshsima & Banaruee, 2017).

Research findings revealed that the most common errors encountered by ESL students in Pakistan were related to writing mechanics and spelling (Zafar, 2016). Spelling errors were mainly related to phonetic shortcomings or carelessness. Students often composed words as pronounced, resulting in errors such as *studeeing* instead of *studying*. Moreover, slight differences in both meaning and spellings were noted often, such as confusing *farther* and *further*, and *affect* and *effect*. These writing errors can break the flow and inhibit the meaning of a text, making it difficult for the reader to understand (Fareed et al., 2021).

One reason for the repeated occurrence of such errors is that students receive inadequate feedback and too few opportunities to revise and edit their drafts (Aryadoust & Riaz, 2017). In many cases, even when feedback is provided, it is often unclear or insufficient. For example, Mallahi (2022) found that feedback given to ESL students was often vague and lacked specific suggestions for improvement. Thus, students could not fully understand their errors and how to correct them, resulting in repeatedly making the same mistakes. Therefore, providing students with opportunities to receive feedback and guidance in revising and editing their drafts is important.

### 1.3. Mediating English as a second language writing with dynamic assessment

Recently, employing DA as a teaching method to improve the writing skills of ESL learners has drawn increased attention. Several research studies have been conducted to determine how DA affects different aspects of writing instruction in an ESL context. These studies advance DA as

a strategy that helps ESL learners improve their writing and informs ESL writing instruction and assessment. For instance, Khoshsima et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study to explore the impact of interactionist DA on the writing proficiency of higher secondary-level ESL learners. The results revealed a noticeable difference between the experimental and control groups, showing that providing support for DA effectively improves ESL learners' writing skills. Mauludin and Ardianti (2017) conducted a study in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in Indonesia and found that using DA helped students gain more confidence. The experimental group students asked for help more easily and improved their writing skills significantly when compared to the control group. Similar results were reported by Rashidi and Bahadori Nejad (2018), indicating that DA improved writing skills, writing motivation, and organization of ideas. The results revealed that the experimental group's writing performance improved significantly when compared to the control group.

Based on such findings, it has been found that DA not only improves writing performance, but also promotes autonomy and metacognition among students. Mediation and individualized feedback in DA empower learners to take control of their writing performance and acquire a deeper understanding of their strengths and weaknesses (Poehner & Lantolf, 2013).

Given this, the current study aimed to investigate the impact of DA mediation on the improvement of Pakistani learners' errors related to writing mechanics in their essays. Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of DA in enhancing writing skills among ESL learners (Poehner, 2008). It is especially useful in the improvement of writing mechanics by enabling individualized mediation and adaptive instruction (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Using mixed methods, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effectiveness of dynamic assessment in reducing writing mechanics errors among Pakistani learners in their essay drafts?
2. How do experimental group students perceive the mediational intervention and dynamic assessment as an alternative approach to static assessment in improving writing mechanics?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Setting and participants

The study took place at an urban school in Sindh, Pakistan, recognized for its high-quality education. The school served approximately 4,000 students from diverse backgrounds who spoke Sindhi, Siraiki, Urdu, Punjabi, or Balochi as their first language, while all students were also learning English as a second language. The target population for the present study began with 54 students in grades 11 and 12, whose teachers volunteered their class for participation. To ensure control over English language proficiency, all students were administered the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). The OPT is an

hour-long test with 30 minutes for assessment of sentence structure and vocabulary skills, and 30 minutes to assess writing. Of the 54 students who took the OPT, 36 scored between 30 and 40.5 and were selected for participation in the study. Students scoring in this range attain mediocre levels per the OPT rubric. Of the 36 students, 6 chose not to participate, leaving 30 study participants. The 30 participants were then randomly assigned to either an experimental ( $n = 15$ ) or control group ( $n = 15$ ). The participants were guaranteed anonymity and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

### 2.2. Design

A sequential explanatory design was employed to investigate the effect of DA on Pakistani ESL learners' writing mechanics. This design facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon by collecting quantitative and qualitative data sequentially. The quantitative part of the study used an interventionist model of DA, with a pretest-treatment-posttest design, while the qualitative part used semi-structured interviews.

### 2.3. Instrumentation

#### 2.3.1. Writing

A study conducted by Mahdavi (2014) served as the basis for the pre and posttest writing test. To complete the test, students were allowed 40 minutes to write an essay of about 250 words from a prompt obtained from a previous higher secondary level test.

#### 2.3.2. Interview guide

To gain insight into how learners who underwent the DA procedure perceived and interpreted their experiences, students in the experimental group were interviewed following the completion of the study. The interview guide was adapted from a study by Estaji and Ameri (2020) to fit the specifics of the present study. The interview consisted of 11 questions that covered the effectiveness of DA, the role of the teacher in DA, and the difference between DA and SA procedures.

#### 2.3.3. Intervention procedure

A 6-week intervention was designed to address the six identified areas of difficulties in writing mechanics. Those six areas included tenses, articles, subject-verb agreement, conditionals, prepositions, and pronouns. To deliver the intervention, six lesson plans on each topic were constructed. The first author taught a 40-minute lesson once a week to both the control and experimental groups for six consecutive weeks on each topic. Following each lesson, students wrote an essay focusing on the area of writing topic (tenses, articles, subject-verb agreement, conditionals, prepositions, and pronouns) covered in the lesson. Both groups were instructed in the same six topics over six weeks

and wrote essays on the same prompts; assessment approaches differed. Control group students were assessed using a traditional static assessment for each topic, while students in the experimental group underwent the DA procedure for each topic, whereby their writing mechanics were assessed using DA mediational moves. The

mediational moves were adapted from Poehener’s (2005) mediation typology, which was developed in a parallel manner to the Regulatory Scale-Implicit to Explicit by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) and consisted of 15 mediational moves. We selected and used 7 of the 15 mediational moves that were directly related to writing

**Table 1.**  
*Mediational Moves Used with Experimental Group Students*

Implicit mediational moves	Explicit mediational moves
Requesting for Revision	Specifying the Error
Requesting for Verification	Providing an Example Related to the Error
Specifying the Location of an Error	Providing Correct Response
	Providing an Explanation

areas and categorized them into two groups, namely implicit and explicit mediation moves, as noted in Table 1.

Participants in the experimental group were mediated individually, and not every mediational move was used in every session with each participant. In each mediational instance, the teacher started with the implicit level of mediation and moved on to its culminating explicit level. The students were then asked to write another draft incorporating the whole mediation. For example, every week, the experimental group students brought their written drafts individually on Wednesday. The teacher used the first and most implicit mediational move, requesting revision, by asking students to re-read their drafts to identify any errors. For some students, this implicit level of mediation was enough to recognize their errors. Once identified, the students had to write a second draft with corrections. If not, the teacher then moved to explicit mediational moves to correct their writing mechanics errors. Every student wrote at least two to three drafts of each essay, depending on how quickly they rectified their errors due to mediation.

It was observed that, as the weeks progressed, the number of mediational moves decreased, compared to the previous week. In the first week, the students took more time as the process was entirely new for them. However, as they became familiar with the mediational moves, they required fewer number of moves in the later weeks. The number of moves used in each class was recorded, and the trajectory of moves over six weeks can be seen below in Figure 1.

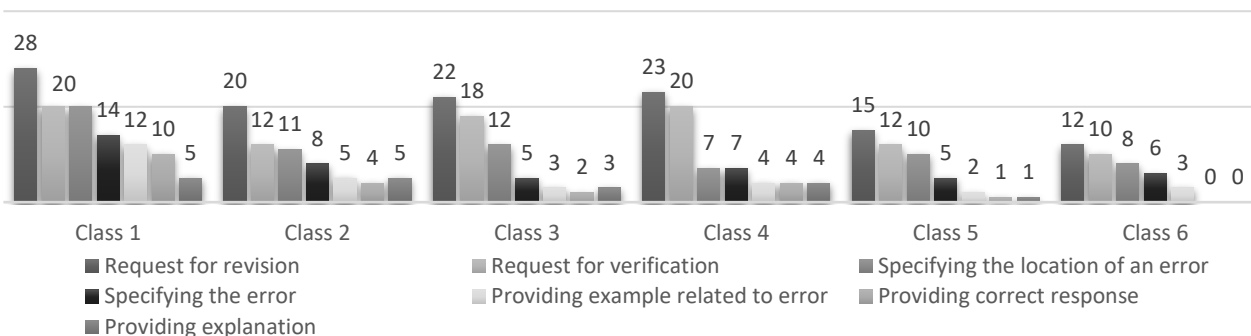
Figure 1 presents a detailed trajectory of class-wise mediational moves used to help students correct their writing mechanics errors. The first three bars from left to

right represent the number of implicit mediational moves, while the later four bars show the number of explicit mediational moves used per class. Overall, implicit moves were used more frequently than explicit moves. This approach was used to mediate the essays for 6 weeks, after which the posttest was administered.

**2.4. Data analysis**

To analyze the data collected from the experimental and control groups, SPSS Statistics version 23 was used. The normality of the data was first assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk normality test. Then, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed for both the experimental and control groups. Next, a paired samples t-test was performed to compare the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group and determine the effectiveness of DA procedure. The control group was used as a benchmark for comparison.

For the qualitative analysis, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and open codes were used to code data. Next, codes were organized into categories and subcategories through axial coding. Finally, those categories and subcategories were refined into themes and sub-themes. An inductive approach was employed, enabling themes to emerge from data instead of imposing preconceived themes on data. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured while transcribing, coding, and categorizing it into themes. Moreover, quotes from the participants’ interviews were used to support the findings and describe their perceptions of DA.



**Figure 1.**  
*The Trajectory of Class-wise Mediational Moves*

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Quantitative findings

Firstly, descriptive statistics and t-test results of both groups at the pretest were used to ascertain learners' writing mechanics performance before intervention. Then, the descriptive statistics and t-test results of both groups at the posttest were reported to reveal the degree to which experimental posttest scores diverged from those of the control group.

Category-wise writing mechanics errors were tabulated for both groups' learners on the pretest to determine if both groups had the same level of proficiency before intervention. Moreover, the data were examined for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test during the descriptive statistics process. Table 2 presents the category-wise mean scores and standard deviations of writing mechanics errors in the drafts written by both groups' participants at pretest.

Based on the mean scores for all six categories, it was concluded that both groups did not differ across all categories before intervention. The low standard deviations across all categories also suggest that there was little variance in either groups' performance. Due to the performance of multiple tests, a Bonferroni adjustment was applied to control for a Type 1 error (.05/6 = .008) in both the equality of variance and means tests. Results revealed no statistically significant tests confirming the data to be normally distributed.

Table 3 presents the independent t-test results, which revealed no statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups on the pretest writing test, adding further support to similar proficiency between the

control and experimental groups on the six indicators of writing mechanics prior to treatment.

Following the comparison of errors made by both groups at pretest, the posttest performance of both groups was compared through descriptive statistics first, and through independent samples t-test second, to determine if there is any difference between the groups' performance. Table 4 presents the category-wise mean scores and standard deviations of writing mechanics errors in the drafts written by participants at posttest. The mean score of experimental group participants' errors is approximately twice lower than the mean score of control group participants' errors. To validate the findings and evaluate the statistical significance of the difference between groups at posttest, we administered an independent samples t-test. Table 5 presents the results of the t-test.

Based on the outcomes of the independent samples t-test, the p-values for each of writing variables was statistically significant. Favoring the treatment group, thus it was concluded that DA mediation provided to the experimental group was successful and resulted in a significant reduction of experimental group participants' writing mechanics errors as compared to control group.

The quantitative findings of this study confirm the significant impact of DA and are consistent with previous research that reports DA as an effective approach to improving writing skills. The findings also confirm that the provision of intervention via implicit and explicit mediational moves had a significant effect on Pakistani ESL learners' writing mechanics.

Following a quantitative test of the efficacy of DA we interviewed the participants of the experimental group to investigate their perceptions of DA mediation approach. The

**Table 2.**  
Descriptive Statistics of Category-wise Errors Made by Both Groups at Pretest

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Shapiro-Wilk		
					Statistic	df	Sig.
Pronoun	Experimental	15	3.00	1.648	.940	14	.385
	Control	15	3.33	1.543	.945	14	.445
Subject-verb agreement	Experimental	15	2.73	1.751	.930	14	.271.129
	Control	15	2.80	1.320	.909	14	
Tenses	Experimental	15	3.53	2.100	.903	14	.106
	Control	15	3.40	1.298	.908	14	.128
Articles	Experimental	15	2.07	1.163	.910	14	.134
	Control	15	2.60	1.920	.929	14	.265
Conditional	Experimental	15	2.20	1.082	.910	14	.134
	Control	15	2.40	1.595	.929	14	.268
Preposition	Experimental	15	2.20	1.207	.919	14	.184
	Control	15	2.13	1.060	.927	14	.246

**Table 3.**  
Results of Tests for Between-group Differences in Equality of Variance and Means

Variable	Equality of Variances		Equality of Means	
	F(28)	Sig.	t(28)	p-value
Pronouns	.067	.798	.572	.772
Subject-verb agreement	.739	.397	.118	.907
Tenses	4.457	.044	.209	.836
Articles	4.634	.040	.920	.365
Conditionals	2.126	.156	.402	.691
Prepositions	.698	.410	.161	.873

Note. Equality of variance measured using Levene's Test. p-values reflect a 2-tailed test.



**Table 4.**  
*Descriptive Analysis of Category-wise Errors Made by Both Groups on Posttest*

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Shapiro-Wilk		
					Statistic	Df	Sig.
Pronouns	Experimental	15	1.47	.915	.896	15	.082
	Control	15	3.13	1.187	.931	15	.279
Subject-verb agreement	Experimental	15	1.47	1.187	.899	15	.091
	Control	15	2.93	1.335	.924	15	.224
Tenses	Experimental	15	1.47	1.246	.908	15	.126
	Control	15	3.00	1.195	.918	15	.181
Articles	Experimental	15	1.27	.884	.888	15	.063
	Control	15	3.07	1.280	.906	15	.117
Conditionals	Experimental	15	1.27	.884	.888	15	.063
	Control	15	2.33	1.397	.920	15	.190
Prepositions	Experimental	15	1.33	.976	.891	15	.070
	Control	15	2.20	1.082	.915	15	.162

interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for recurring themes and sub-themes. The findings are presented below, supported by selected exact quotes.

### 3.2. Dynamic assessment encourages collaboration

The intervention part of DA, involving teacher-student collaboration and the integration of assessment and instruction, was perceived as a collaborative approach to assessment by the students. The students expressed that DA encouraged repeated collaboration, which was categorized into two sub-themes, namely teacher-student collaboration and assessment-instruction integration.

### 3.3. Teacher-student collaboration

Eighty-seven percent of interviewees (13 out of 15) reported that their writing mechanics improved as a result of collaboration. Through the use of mediation moves, the teacher and students worked together to identify and correct errors.

As one student noted:

*This was the very first time I was assessed with DA. It was completely different from the patterns previously used in my class. Prior to this, my teachers never assessed my writing skills that way. I could never improve my writing skills. Now, when I was engaged in consistent collaboration with the teacher, I improved my writing skills a lot.*

Another student reported:

*I have never experienced such a collaborative assessment approach. My previous teacher never called me while*

*assessing my writing drafts. He always used to check my drafts in his office and gave us the results the following day. But in DA teacher guided me, showed me my errors and together we rectified the errors. Now, I feel I have improved my essay writing skills.*

The majority of participants consistently reported that collaboration with their teacher benefitted their writing mechanics. They also emphasized the value of integrating assessment and instruction, suggesting that this approach was critical to improving writing mechanics.

### 3.4. Assessment-instruction collaboration

Eight percent of participants (12 out of 15) perceived DA as distinct from traditional assessment practices. Participants reported DA was a collaboration between assessment and instruction, meaning they were taught and assessed simultaneously. This characteristic of DA separated it from traditional static assessment approaches where teaching occurred prior to assessment. Participants also reported that the DA approach transformed their understanding of teaching and assessment, suggesting that the two were more integrated by DA than previously thought.

As noted by a student:

*I found DA very interesting because it was being conducted with teaching. Our teacher was teaching us, and then made us write the essays and he assessed our essays then and there. The next day, we wrote the second draft. After this whole process, I realized that if we were assessed through DA in the past, we had been skilled writers.*

**Table 5.**  
*Independent Samples T-test Results of Category-wise Errors of Both Groups at Posttest*

Variable	Group	Test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means		
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pronouns	Experimental	.905	.350	4.306	28	.000
	Control					
Subject-verb agreement	Experimental	.069	.845	3.180	28	.004
	Control					
Tenses	Experimental	.158	.694	3.440	28	.002
	Control					
Articles	Experimental	1.691	.204	4.482	28	.000
	Control					
Conditionals	Experimental	2.683	.113	2.499	28	.003
	Control					
Prepositions	Experimental	.130	1.000	2.303	28	.001
	Control					

### 3.5. Dynamic assessment releases stress

The majority of interviewees reported experiencing less stress with DA than with traditional static assessment. Unlike static assessment, where students were expected to adhere to pre-set rubrics or standards, DA encouraged students to focus on improving writing mechanics without any pressure of meeting specific criteria. Interviewees described DA as a supportive, motivating, and less burdensome approach to assessment. These themes coalesced under the main theme of DA reducing stress, with a sub-theme of a supportive writing environment, which is discussed in detail below.

### 3.6. Supportive environment of writing

Fourteen of the 15 reported that they found DA to be supportive and encouraging. Unlike traditional assessment methods, errors were viewed as a learning opportunity rather than a cause for reprimand. Participants expressed gratitude for teacher's readiness to provide support during the error correction process.

Noted by a student:

*Previously, when I knew that there was any test, particularly a writing test, I would feel stressed till I did not receive a good grade in it. I think traditional assessment was liked by those students who were already extraordinary. For struggling students like me, it was stressful. However, DA was very relaxing. Because in DA if I made any mistakes, I was not judged or labeled; instead helped and guided.*

### 3.7. Dynamic assessment enhances self-efficacy

The provision of feedback through implicit and explicit mediational moves during the collaborative process of DA allowed them to revisit their essays and rectify their errors, resulting in an increased sense of self-efficacy. From participants' responses, two subthemes emerged: 1) becoming reflective and learning from their own mistakes, and 2) believing in self-abilities. These abilities, taken together, contributed to an overall increase in self-efficacy. The findings of both subthemes are presented below.

### 3.8. Dynamic assessment lets students learn from their own mistakes

Eighty percent of the participants (12 out of 15) reported that DA provided them with a unique opportunity to learn from their mistakes, self-correct their errors, and engage in a dialogue with their teacher about the reasons behind their writing mechanics errors. They reported that this approach was a departure from the traditional assessment, where they believed that the teacher was solely responsible for the assessment process, and the assessment was a one-way process conducted with an objectivist approach, whereby students were evaluated against fixed criteria.

As one student said:

*DA was effective for me. When I wrote the first essay, there were more than 20 errors. When I wrote the last essay after*

*two weeks, my errors were four times lesser. This became possible because DA provided me with a chance to ponder over my mistakes.*

Likewise, another student mentioned:

*For me, DA was exciting and somehow inspiring which enabled me to learn from my weak areas in writing. The best thing about DA was, it let me know where I lacked. For instance, when I was making a mistake, the teacher was helping me to reach the particular error by using different moves. From this practice, I knew my errors and tried to rectify them. I think now I have been able to proofread my essays and correct my errors independently.*

### 3.9. Dynamic assessment enhances belief in self-abilities

Sixty-six percent of the participants (10 out of 15) reported that DA had a positive impact on their self-belief. Specifically, during the writing process, as they revised their essays and saw improvement in subsequent drafts, they felt more confident in their writing abilities which increased their belief in themselves and served as a motivating factor for them to continue working on their writing skills.

As reported by a student:

*Due to DA, I recognized my potential level in writing. In other words, I recognized my self-abilities. Earlier I was facing many problems due to many misconceptions which resulted in underperformance in writing. The traditional assessment could not help me in clarifying those misconceptions. In the traditional assessment procedure, I received grades and scores on my drafts without any feedback. Therefore, I repeatedly made similar errors. However, DA identified my potential level and helped me achieve it through mediation.*

### 3.10. Attitude

The role of the teacher in DA process as a mediator for learners to achieve their proximal development level was emphasized by all participants. They uniformly expressed positive experiences with the attitude towards them during DA process. Specifically, they identified two key aspects: friendly demeanor and the positive feedback they received. Both subthemes are discussed in detail below.

### 3.11. Friendly behavior

One hundred percent of the participants (15 of 15) expressed their gratitude towards the efforts in helping them improve their writing mechanics. They stated that they never encountered a teacher who put in so much effort to guide and support them. One said:

*The most interesting thing about DA was that the teacher was like a friend. Instead of helping me correct my errors, he made me believe If I were guided and helped earlier, I would have been a proficient writer.*

Another student said:

*The role of the teacher was very demanding in DA. The great thing about DA was, the teacher did not get irritated with my repeated errors, instead, he helped me every time.*

### 3.12. Positive feedback

Eighty-seven percent of the participants (13 out of 15) stated that they noticed a significant difference in the guiding feedback they received in DA as compared to the feedback they received in traditional assessment. In traditional assessment, they believed that feedback was merely a few words, such as excellent, *very good*, or *poor*. However, in DA, the teacher discussed their essays feedback was specific to areas needing improvement. They valued that they were not labeled with negative titles such as duffers or slow students, which they said they received frequently from their previous teachers.

*According to a student:*

Unlike the previous traditional teacher, the teacher in DA did not collect the essays for grading; instead, he used to sit with me to discuss my drafts. He asked me to re-read particular sentences. He asked questions such as, "Don't you think that the past tense should be used here? Using different ways, he made me point out every minor and major mistake and helped me correct it.

### 3.13. Dynamic assessment is beneficial yet tedious

Despite the positive impact of DA on their writing mechanics, all 15 participants expressed their concerns about the time-consuming nature of DA process. They acknowledged that the teacher provided individual mediation to each student that addressed their writing needs. Some students were able to rectify their errors with implicit mediation moves, while others required explicit mediation. Having received mediation, each student had to write a second draft of the essay. If errors persisted, they were required to write a third draft and so on, until all errors were rectified, which resulted in a significant amount of time being invested in the process.

### 3.14. Dynamic assessment requires writing various drafts

Eighty percent of the participants (12 out of 15) reported that DA was time-consuming because they had to write multiple drafts, which prevented them from covering other topics in the syllabus. Instead, the majority of participants believed that the benefits of DA outweighed the drawbacks, and they felt that it was a valuable approach to improving their writing mechanics.

*According to one student:*

*For me, DA was a lengthier process. Whenever I wrote essays, I was called by the teacher for feedback. I understand, that he was trying to help me with my writing mechanics, but it consumed a lot of time. Sometimes, I had to write three drafts of the same essay which took a huge time. Resultantly, I could not learn other topics in my English course which were supposed to appear in the exam.*

Another student said:

*DA was a time-taking process. After being mediated by the teacher, I had to write the second draft of the same essay. If*

*there were any mistakes in the second draft, I had to write the third draft. My whole time was consumed in writing the drafts, and as a result, I missed many other topics in English.*

Based on our qualitative findings, DA had a positive effect on students' writing mechanics. Students reported that DA reduced writing anxiety, enhanced self-efficacy, and provided them with ample opportunities to learn from their errors. Overall, DA provided a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment for their improved writing mechanic areas.

## 4. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to measure the efficacy of DA on Pakistani ESL learners' writing mechanics. Additionally, the study investigated the perceptions of participants regarding the mediation they had received. The findings indicate that the experimental group showed significant improvements compared to the control group, as evidenced by the pre-and posttest mean scores and independent sample t-test results. These results advance the credibility of DA as a valuable instructional approach to improve ESL students' performance in writing mechanics.

Notably, our study found that as the experimental group approached their potential writing skills, they required less explicit mediation moves and more implicit ones, indicating cognitive growth in their writing process. This finding is in line with the argument made by Ebadi and Rahimi (2019), that students who require less explicit mediation exhibit greater cognitive development and become independent learners more quickly than their peers. We attribute this growth to greater student autonomy in dealing with errors related to writing mechanics.

The second research question of the study sought to explore the perceptions of experimental group participants who underwent DA treatment. Drawing upon the results of the interviews, the participants not only unanimously held positive views about DA but also gave new insights regarding its effect on their writing skills. For example, interviewees reported that collaboration between teacher and student during mediation made DA different from static assessment, and due to such collaboration, they were able to better rectify their errors. This kind of collaboration between the teacher and learner during the assessment is in line with the notion that learning does not take place in isolation, rather it happens in collaboration and interaction with a more knowledgeable other.

Adding to the student-teacher collaboration, the students did talk about teaching and assessment integration. They repeatedly stated that DA presented both teaching and assessment as a unified activity that they had not previously experienced. Owing to such integration, they found DA very interesting as it was conducted during teaching. Poehner and Lantolf (2005) endorsed this idea in their research, mentioning that DA is a procedure that merges teaching and assessment into a seamless and integrated activity that simultaneously assesses and promotes the learner's zone of development.

Moreover, from the perspective of the participants of the study, DA is relatively less stressful than traditional static



assessment. DA offers an encouraging, supportive and instructive environment that makes students comfortable while they are assessed (Shrestha & Coffin, 2012). In contrast, students feel nervous during static assessment, which results in anxiety among students during the exams (Naeini & Duvall, 2012). Similar findings were also reported by Kazemi, Bagheri et al. (2020) whereby interviewees shared that DA remained inspiring and encouraging due to the continuous mediation of the teacher. This activity encourages students to feel easy and relaxed as they can get assistance from the teacher whenever they face any problem. This encouraging environment is absent in the traditional assessment, which makes students reluctant to tell their problems. However, through mediation, the teacher actively interacts with the students, which makes it easier for them to express their problems.

The findings of the interviews also note that DA enhances the students' writing efficacy as it provides various opportunities for the students to reflect on their errors and rectify them. This skill of self-efficacy gradually helps students learn from their errors and helps build their confidence. As a result, they become increasingly independent in the development of their writing mechanics. As Mauludin and Ardianti (2017) highlighted, DA helps enable students to analyze the errors in their write-ups. Consequently, students become less teacher-dependent as they increasingly trust their own abilities.

Having highlighted all the positive aspects of DA, the interviewees did mention the time consumption during the DA process. Most interviewees reported that they received rigorous feedback on their drafts from the teacher, which was supposed to be incorporated by them in the next draft. This way, they kept writing the drafts until all the errors had been rectified, however, the process was time-consuming. This aspect of DA may be a barrier to using it in the classroom due to limitations of a regular Pakistani classroom, such as a very large class size, time limits, and course completion issues. These constraints have been echoed in previous research. For instance, the findings of Afshari et al. (2020) highlighted that although teachers perceive DA as an effective approach to improving writing skills, they find it difficult to implement in the classroom due to the need for significant planning time. Apart from time, the teacher must have enough theoretical knowledge and proper training in writing mechanics to implement DA in the classroom. The teacher should know how to assist the learner and how to mediate his skills to enhance his ZPD dialogically through interaction or intervention. For these reasons, some teachers may hesitate to use DA in their classroom, however, more research is needed to better specify these issues.

## 5. Conclusion

The current study advanced DA as an effective approach to improving ESL students' writing mechanics. Pedagogically, DA is an instructional tool that helps students reach new understandings that will improve their writing performance. Rather than a traditional static assessment to

measure current knowledge, DA focuses on promoting learning and motivation based on the mediation given by the teacher to follow the most salient feature of ZPD (Ebadi & Bashir, 2020).

The findings of the current study showed that the interaction between teachers and students during mediation contributed to the writing development of students and helped them work toward self-regulation. Nevertheless, DA is not a magical approach to bringing an overnight transformation among students, as it requires a considerable amount of time and effort to properly implement (Lantolf et al., 2015). What makes DA different is its optimistic view that students can develop through social and cultural means. This humanistic view of DA minimizes anxiety among students and maximizes their level of confidence. Almost all the participants of the current study recognized not only the effect DA had on their final product (writing mechanics), but also on the process they were engaged in to produce their drafts. Students highlighted that DA left a long-lasting impact on their cognitive abilities and provided them with what they required to improve their writing mechanics.

## Declarations

### Competing interest

The authors declared no competing interest.

### Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Authors' contributions

All authors were equally involved in the following four aspects 1) substantial contributions to conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; 2) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content; and 3) final approval of the version to be published; and 4) agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

### Ethical consideration

All Authors declare that they have observed ethical issues, including plagiarism, double submission, and data originality.

## References

- Afshari, H., Amirian, Z., & Tavakoli, M. (2020). Applying group dynamic assessment procedures to support EFL writing development: Learner achievement, learners' and teachers' perceptions. *Journal of Writing Research*, 11(3), 445-476. <https://doi.org/10.17239/jowr-2020.11.03.02>
- Alkhudiry, R. (2022). The contribution of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in

- mediating L2 knowledge co-construction. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(10), 2117-2123. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1210.19>
- 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(4), 465-483. <https://doi.org/10.2307/328585>
- Aryadoust, V., & Riazi, M. (2017). Role of assessment in second language writing research and pedagogy. *Educational Psychology*, 37(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2016.1227089>
- Bukhari, S. H., & Mahmood, N. (2017). Challenges in assessment of L2 writing: Teachers' perspectives in Pakistani universities. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 29, 49-60.
- Cho, H. (2018). The impact of form-focused instruction on L2 writing development: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 42, 29-44.
- Ebadi, S., Bashir, S. (2021). An exploration into EFL learners' writing skills via mobile-based dynamic assessment. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26, 1995-2016. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10348-4>
- Ebadi, S., & Rahimi, M. (2019) Mediating EFL learners' academic writing skills in online dynamic assessment using Google Docs. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 32(5-6), 527-555. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2018.1527362>
- Estaji, M., & Ameri, A. F. (2020). Dynamic assessment and its impact on pre-intermediate and high-intermediate EFL learners' grammar achievement. *Cogent Education*, 7(1), 1740040. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1740040>
- Darus, S., & Ching, K. H. (2009) Common errors in written English essays of form one Chinese student: A case study. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(2), 242-253.
- Fareed, M., Khan, I., & Akhtar, H. (2021). The causes of English writing anxiety among Pakistani ESL students: Perceptions of teachers and students. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9(1), 21-27. <https://doi.org/10.52131/pijss.2021.0901.0109>
- Gupta, A. (2009). Vygotskian perspectives on using dramatic play to enhance children's development and balance creativity with structure in the early childhood classroom. *Early Child Development and Care*, 179(8), 1041-1054. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430701731654>
- Husna, L. (2017). An analysis of students' writing skill in descriptive text at grade XI IPA 1 of MAN 2 Padang. *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Scholastic*, 1(1), 16-28. <https://doi.org/10.36057/jips.v1i1.281>
- Imran, M. K., & Abbas, T. (2019). Moving beyond product-based writing assessment in Pakistani classrooms. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 18(1), 93-107.
- Jaramillo, J. A. (1996). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and contributions to the development of constructivist curricula. *Education*, 117(1), 133-141.
- Kazemi, A., Bagheri, M. S., & Rassaei, E. (2020). Dynamic assessment in English classrooms: Fostering learners' reading comprehension and motivation. *Cogent Psychology*, 7(1), 1788912. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2020.1788912>
- Khoshima, H., & Banaruee, H. (2017). L1 interfering and L2 developmental writing errors among Iranian EFL learners. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 2(4), 1-15. <https://oapub.org/edu/index.php/ejel/article/view/790/2247>
- Khoshima, H., Saed, A., & Mortazavi, M. (2016). The impact of interactionist dynamic assessment on explanation writing ability of intermediate EFL learners. *International journal of language and linguistics*, 4(5), 183-189. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijll.20160405.13>
- Lantolf, J. P. (2011). Dynamic assessment: Bringing the past into the future. *Language Teaching*, 44(3), 309-315.
- Lantolf, J. P., Thorne, S. L., & Poehner, M. E. (2015). Sociocultural theory and second language development. In B. Van Patten & J. Williams (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction* (pp. 207-226).
- Lantolf, J. P., & Poehner, M. E. (2004). Dynamic assessment of L2 development: Bringing the past into the future. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 49-72. <https://doi.org/10.1558/japl.v1.i1.49>
- Leijten, M., & Van Waes, L. (2013). Analyzing the writing process: An introduction. *Analyzing and Modeling The Writing Process*.
- Mahdavi, M. (2014). The effect of dynamic assessment on essay writing ability of Iranian EFL learners: A gender related study. [M.A. Thesis Eastern Mediterranean University]. <http://i-rep.emu.edu.tr:8080/jspui/handle/11129/1657>
- Mallahi, O. (2022). Investigating the moves and problems of Iranian EFL learners while writing summaries in academic contexts. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 28, 1-30. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1360922.pdf>
- Matsuda, P. K., & Tardy, C. M. (2017). Teaching composition/teaching writing: Recurring issues and renewed debates.
- Mauludin, L. A., & Ardianti, T. M. (2017). The role of dynamic assessment in EFL writing class. *Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, 1(2), 82-93. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/228481175.pdf>
- Naeini, J., & Duvall, E. (2012). Dynamic assessment and the impact on English language learners' reading comprehension performance. *Language Testing in Asia*, 2(22), 22-41. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1186/2229-0443-2-22.pdf>
- Patang, H., Machmoed, H., & Nasmilah. (2020). Promoting autonomous language learners through lesson study program: Vygotsky's social constructivism perspective. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 3(4), 572-581. <https://doi.org/10.34050/elsjsh.v3i4.12338>
- Poehner, M. E., & Lantolf, J. P. (2005). Dynamic assessment in the language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 9(3), 233-265. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1362168805lr1660a>
- Poehner, M.E. (2008). *Dynamic assessment: A Vygotskian approach to understanding and promoting second language development*. Springer.
- Poehner, M. E., & Wang, Z. (2021). Dynamic assessment and second language development. *Language Teaching*, 54(4), 472-490. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444820000555>
- Rashidi, N., & Bahadori Nejad, Z. (2018). An investigation into the effect of dynamic assessment on the EFL learners' process writing development. *Sage Open*, 8(2), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018784643>
- Sarwar, M. (2019). Exploring writing assessment practices in Pakistani universities: A mixed-methods approach. *Journal of Language Assessment and Evaluation*, 1(1), 67-93.
- Shrestha, P., & Coffin, C. (2012) Dynamic assessment, tutor mediation and academic writing development, *Assessing Writing*, 17(1), 55-70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2011.11.003>
- Uddin, A., & Akhtar, M. A. (2020). Writing assessment in Pakistan: Practices, challenges, and implications. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 27(5), 561-577.
- Xian, L. (2020). The effectiveness of dynamic assessment in linguistic accuracy in EFL writing: An investigation assisted by online scoring systems. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 18, 98-114. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1270037.pdf>
- Xi, J., & Lantolf, J. P. (2021). Mediation and the zone of proximal development: A problematic relationship. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 51(1), 25-48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12260>
- Zafar, A. (2016). Error analysis: A tool to improve English skills of undergraduate students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 217, 697-705. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.02.122>
- Zhang, M. (2018). Collaborative writing in the EFL classroom: The effects of L1 and L2 use. *System*, 76, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.04.009>