Group Dynamic Assessment in Second Language Writing Teaching: Review and Prospect

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Abstract: This article compiles and summarizes the research on dynamic assessment in the field of second language writing teaching at home and abroad. Firstly, it explains the definitions of dynamic assessment and group dynamic assessment. Then, it summarizes and reviews the research on the application of dynamic assessment and group dynamic assessment in the field of second language writing teaching respectively. Finally, it looks forward to the future development trend of relevant research. The findings show that: the research on dynamic assessment and group dynamic assessment in the field of second language teaching abroad has been flourishing, while the research on group dynamic assessment at home started later than that abroad, and the subjects of empirical studies at home and abroad mainly focus on college students, with a lack of research on secondary school students. In the future, the research on the application of group dynamic assessment in second language writing teaching can be developed in the following directions: in-depth exploration of group dynamic assessment, large-scale empirical research, rational use of technological assistance, application of diversified teaching, etc.

Keywords: dynamic assessment; group dynamic assessment; second language writing teaching; research review; research prospect

1. Introduction

Dynamic Assessment (DA), rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and further advanced by psychologist Feuerstein, has emerged as a prominent focus in Western psychological research and educational measurement practices (Han, 2009)[1][2]. Unlike traditional static testing, which prioritizes evaluating individuals' existing abilities through outcome-oriented metrics, DA adopts a process-oriented approach. It emphasizes learners' potential developmental levels by integrating the learning process with outcomes, aiming to assess both current competencies and latent capacities while guiding learners toward their maximal developmental potential. In China, however, the individualized nature of one-on-one DA poses implementation challenges given the vast population of Chinese English learners. Since the early 21st century, applied research on group-based dynamic assessment (G-DA) has progressively gained traction, establishing itself as an innovative direction in second language assessment research.

2. Definition of Core Concepts

2.1 Dynamic assessment

The definition of dynamic assessment (DA) is understood differently by different scholars. Although DA originated from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, he did not use the term dynamic assessment in his works[1]. One of his most influential colleagues, Luria (1961), compared the evaluation methods of "statistics" and "dynamics" before officially using the term dynamic assessment[3]. Tzuriel and Kaufman (1999:79-84) pointed out that DA is essentially an instructional intervention designed to change students' cognitive abilities[4]. It is used to assess whether students' learning and problem-solving skills have improved during the intervention. According to Sternberg (2002), DA not only detects students' learning outcomes but also focuses on their learning process[5]. He states that DA focuses on the teaching and learning process, emphasizing that there is an inseparability between the learning process and the assessment of teaching. However, this definition fails to adequately reflect Vygotsky's vision of ZPD development. Vygotsky's "development" is not limited to a single task or test, but includes the individual's ability to mediate the transfer of internalization to other tasks. Lidz and Gindis (2003)

proposed that DA is a collective term for a range of evaluation methods that explore learners' potential abilities through interaction between evaluators and learners, with the usual intervention of evaluators[6]. Poehner and Lantolf (2005) argues that in dynamic assessment, the term "assessment" has a qualitative difference from the concepts in psychology and education: "assessment" in psychology and education is an observation and recording of an individual's potential abilities to infer them, while "assessment" in DA stimulates learners' potential abilities through dialogue and collaboration between learners and evaluators[7].

2.2 Group dynamic assessment

The concept of group dynamic assessment (G-DA) originated from the theory of dynamic assessment. Poehner (2008) believes that one of the main challenges to achieve DA in the classroom is that this kind of environment does not have the conditions to implement one-on-one DA, which is the characteristic of most DA and ZPD studies, because teachers in the classroom interact with a group or a group of students' ZPD, so a group dynamic assessment is required[8]. Vygotsky once envisioned conducting mediation activities around a group's zone of proximal development, where members collaborate internally and provide support for the entire group's mediation. This not only enhances the overall zone of proximal development, but also promotes individual development. Based on this assumption, Poehner first proposed the term group dynamic assessment (G-DA) in 2009. G-DA and one-on-one dynamic assessment follow the same general rule, that is, to provide learners with mediation to help them jointly build a ZPD[9]. However, the difference between the two is that G-DA must also take into account the ZPD of the group, which emphasizes the participation of the whole group, but this does not mean that teachers do not provide mediation for individuals, but that every mediation also points to the group. According to this point, Poehner (2009) proposed that there are two types of interactants in the G-DA classroom: primary interactants (teachers and students being mediated) and secondary interactants (other students in the classroom)[9]. Secondary interactants benefit from listening to the interactions and communication of primary interactants.

In addition, Poehner (2009) distinguished two forms of G-DA: concurrent G-DA and cumulative G-DA[9]. In concurrent G-DA, the teacher talks with the whole group or individual members to provide mediation. When individual team members discuss their problems, difficulties, or opinions with the teacher, other team members will also benefit from their communication and interaction with the teacher. In the cumulative G-DA, teachers and students carry out a series of one-on-one DA interactions in the process of students' group cooperation to solve problems. In other words, team members take turns as the main interactants for communication with the teacher, and subsequent one-on-one exchanges are built upon previous interactions.

3. Relevant Studies on DA in Writing Teaching

3.1 Relevant studies on DA in writing teaching in China

In China, the research on DA theory in second language acquisition is still in its infancy, especially with very few relevant literature in core journals. The main research subjects are college students, with a small portion targeting middle school students. From the perspective of research content, Han (2009) introduced the theory and model of dynamic assessment and its application in foreign language education[2]; Liu and Wu (2017) combed the empirical research on dynamic assessment in the field of foreign language education[10]; Zhang (2010), Kong, Li and Yu (2013), He (2013), Luo (2020), etc. discussed the application of dynamic assessment in writing teaching[11-14]. The writing teaching field mainly focuses on the construction and implementation of the DA system in the writing process, initially focusing on exploring the general DA effect, and then gradually shifting to a more detailed topic: mainly focusing on the effectiveness of different intervention models (interventionist DA and interactionist DA) and the integration of multiple models.

Zhang (2008, 2010, 2014), Lan and Liu (2010) have successively incorporated DA into university writing teaching and conducted empirical research, making them pioneers in empirical research on foreign language DA in China[11,15,16,17]. Among them, Zhang (2008) tried to build a interventionist DA model for college English online writing teaching. The researcher used the process writing theory for reference, carried out a holistic and systematic design of the DA model, and put forward a structural diagram of dynamic assessment "scaffolding" mediation activities in Zhang (2010)[11,15]. This structure is a relatively systematic and complete framework model for domestic DA. Lan and Liu (2010), and He

(2013) explored interactionist DA, among which Lan and Liu (2010) integrated the DA framework into process writing teaching and designed an interactionist DA process for English process writing[17,13]. It was found that 28 out of 30 participants claimed to have made satisfactory progress, with comprehensive and significant improvements in their writing quality and enhanced writing motivation. He (2013) borrowed the interactive thinking of interactionist DA and infused evaluation into the teaching process[13]. Teachers' intervention permeates into each writing step. Learners' writing autonomy continues to increase, and their assessment skills gradually become proficient, which are then internalized and transferred into their own writing abilities. Moreover, Geng, Meng, and Du (2022) summarized the core concepts of C-DA, and through a review of relevant empirical studies in the past two decades, found that the research content of C-DA transitions from macro language ability to micro language ability, and proposed a research framework for C-DA[18].

In addition, in light of the complementary strengths and inherent constraints of the two dynamic assessment models, domestic researchers have progressively explored hybrid models that synergize their pedagogical advantages for application in L2 writing classrooms. Li and Gao (2023) applied dynamic assessment to English education master's degree academic paper quotation writing mediation, which was a longitudinal qualitative case study, attempted to integrate mediation and interaction, and drew on the elements of Campione and Brown (1987) "Progressive Mediation Model" to construct a quotation writing mediation model by adding peers as one of the mediators[19-20]. By adding peers as one of the mediators, a model of quotation writing mediation was constructed. This mode is divided into four stages (16 weeks in total): 1) Behavioral diagnosis (1-2 weeks): obtaining detailed diagnostic information of the subjects through pre-test; 2) Practical interaction (3-7 weeks): deepen understanding and comprehension of problems through peer assistance; 3) Behavior correction (8-12 weeks): Change the behavior of the subject through the mediation of their supervisor; 4) Behavioral internalization (weeks 13-16): Use post tests to identify the changes in thinking and beliefs behind the participants' behavior. The research results indicate that participants have shown varying degrees of improvement in the logical reasoning ability, structural norms, and linguistic technicality of their introduction writing.

In general, domestic scholars have explored and studied the application of different DA models (interventionist and interactionist) and the integration of two DA models in the field of English writing teaching, and also tried to build different dynamic assessment models in writing teaching. However, the main reason why DA has not become the mainstream teaching evaluation method in China is that the testing method adopted by intervention DA is not very different from traditional evaluation, the reality of one-on-one operation mode of interactive DA is not strong, and its reliability and validity are also problems[21].

3.2 International studies on DA in writing teaching

In the international academic community, a good many of scholars have conducted empirical research in the field of EFL/ESL teaching, often using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to verify the effectiveness of DA in second/foreign language teaching[7-8][22-27].

In the initial research, the DA implemented by Budoff and Friedman (1964) is similar to other large-scale non-dynamic assessment methods to a large extent: it only depends on the test scores to assess learners' ability[28]. The study found that learners with the same pre- test scores had different post- test scores after intervention, so Budoff believed that cognitive ability was dynamic and variable. Guthke (1982), based on the research of Budoff, combined intervention with testing. The mediation evolved from an initial single hint to five types of prompts ranging from implicit to explicit[29]. In subsequent studies, participants completed the same task twice and required fewer and more implicit prompts to complete the second task, confirming the improvement in cognitive ability of the participants[30-31]. Later, Fazlollahi, Marefat, and Vaezi (2015) carried out DA research on 45 young students according to the eight-step intervention project proposed by Poehner (2009), and found that compared with traditional teaching methods, DA can significantly improve learners' writing quality[32]. Mauludin (2018) explored the impact of DA on the summary writing quality of secondary learners of English for specific purposes (ESP)[33]. The results showed that both groups improved their summary writing quality, but the experimental group receiving intervention in the assessment process improved more significantly than the control group, that is, the application of DA significantly improved the students' summary writing quality in the ESP classroom.

With the development of this field, Shokoufeh and Saman (2019) explored the impact of DA in the form of face-to-face interaction and computer mediation on how Iranian EFL learners deal with developmental errors in academic writing[34]. Through the analysis of the writing corpus of the two-

month DA academic writing course participated by four learners, it is found that the two forms of mediation have different effects on the development of learners' writing quality. In recent years, computer technology has become increasingly popular and developed. Many researchers have combined computer technology with DA to derive computerized dynamic assessment (C-DA), discussed and verified the effectiveness of C-DA or DA based on other mobile electronic equipment (such as *Google Docs* and *WhatsApp* software) for second language practical teaching[35-39]. However, due to hardware limitations, this research field mainly targets college students.

4. Relevant Studies on G-DA in English Writing Teaching

4.1 Relevant studies on G-DA in writing quality

Shabani (2018) found that during the implementation of G-DA, teachers' prompts can diagnose the sources of learners' writing difficulties and help promote the development of learners' potential abilities[40]. The researchers revealed the subtle changes in learners' writing quality. With the implementation of G-DA, learners' demand for external mediation gradually decreases, and they finally refuse to prompt, which confirms their growing autonomous function and self-regulation performance in processing tasks. Subsequently, Alemi, Miri, and Mozafarnezhad (2019) preliminarily explored the impact of online concurrent G-DA on the grammatical accuracy of middle school English learners' writing quality, providing new paths and methods for language teachers' teaching[41]. And Afshari, Amirian, and Tavakoli (2020) investigated the impact of cumulative G-DA on the development of EFL writing quality in the context of Iranian universities[42]. The results showed that G-DA was more effective than traditional explicit mediation in supporting the development of EFL writing quality. The number of mediation required by learners decreased from 27 in the first stage to 8 in the last stage, which confirmed the effectiveness of G-DA in improving EFL writing quality and learner self-regulation. Among them, low ability learners are more suitable for G-DA programs than medium to high ability learners.

The G-DA implemented by domestic scholar Wang (2011) adopts a pre-test, training, and post-test teaching program. Students from three classes in the first year of a university in Shanghai were divided into high, medium, and low level groups based on their writing exam scores[43]. Then, one student was randomly selected from each group to form a three person study group, with a total of 20 groups of 60 people. The pre-test is independently completed by students. At every step of the following instruction, teachers provide guidance to students in a timely manner, combining teaching with post-test. That is, during post-test, teachers appropriately provide teaching assistance and measure it in teaching exploration. The types of assistance are divided into four categories based on assessment criteria: material selection, structure, text and format, spelling and punctuation. The results show that the mediation of G-DA can only slightly improve the writing quality of high level learners, but has a more obvious effect on the promotion of writing quality of medium and low level learners. In this study, there were only three members in each group, which differed from the G-DA (group based on the entire class) introduced by Poehner (2009) in terms of group size, making it time-consuming and laborious to practice. In addition, the degree of explicitness of mediation under each dimension is not ranked, making the level of mediation required by students cannot be judged.

In addition, some scholars have compared the impact of two types of G-DA (concurrent and cumulative) on second language writing quality, and even integrated the two forms. Kao (2022) tested the performance of five intermediate learners of Chinese as a second language in Chinese reading and writing tasks, and explored the effects of concurrent and cumulative G-DA on participants[44]. It was found that both types of G-DA can promote learners' understanding of the rhetorical structure of "initiation, transmission, and combination", and the more times the learner acts as the main interactants, the better the learning effect he/she presents. The more actively the learner participates (whether verbally or nonverbal), the more it will promote their learning quality. Moradian, Asadi and Azadbakht (2019) found that concurrent G-DA can improve learners' pragmatic competence in writing tasks more than non dynamic assessment[45]. Miri, Alibakhshi, Kushki, and Bavarsad (2017) found that both types of G-DA improved learners' effectiveness in learning English articles, with the concurrent G-DA performing better than the cumulative one[46].

Overall, there are two noteworthy studies on writing quality: firstly, research on writing instruction shows that G-DA has a significantly smaller effect on improving writing quality for students with previously high levels of ability compared to students with intermediate or low levels of ability [42-43]. Second, in the process of carrying out G-DA, domestic researchers only analyzed the types of mediation required by learners from the perspective of writing scoring, such as structure, vocabulary, etc., but did

not determine the degree of explicit of mediation provided to learners, so it is difficult to diagnose the potential development level of learners.

4.2 Relevant studies on learner's attitude towards G-DA

When studying the impact of DA on learners' writing quality, writing ability, and other aspects, many scholars at home and abroad have also explored learners' perceptions and subjective attitudes towards DA, verifying the effectiveness of DA from learners' subjective perspectives[46-50]. There is relatively little research on the application of G-DA in the field of writing teaching, especially in core journals where the number of publications is extremely small. Therefore, research on learners' perceptions and attitudes towards it is also scarce. Given that G-DA originates from DA theory and follows the same general rules as one-on-one DA programs, relevant research on learners' attitudes towards DA were consulted[9].

This type of research collects students' opinions and views through instruments such as questionnaires and interviews, and finds that most students hold a positive attitude towards G-DA, believing that it helps improve their learning motivation and cooperation ability. Firstly, the interview method. Shrestha and Coffin (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with two participants and found that both participants had a positive attitude towards the DA program[47]. On the one hand, participants repeatedly emphasized that their participation in the DA program greatly improved their writing quality, far exceeding their expectations; On the other hand, participants believed that this assessment method was more relaxed compared to traditional assessments, helping them build confidence, and traditional assessment methods could not explain the specific source of their writing scores. Secondly, the questionnaire method. Zhang (2013) also used a questionnaire to explore learners' comments on DA[48]. The feedback questionnaire of the dynamic assessment model of college English writing teaching designed by Zhang is mainly designed around the separate assessment of the four major mediation measures in the research assessment model and the overall comment of the assessment model experiment. Wang and Zhen (2014) compiled the Questionnaire on Teachers' Tips for Writing dynamic assessment[49]. The questionnaire consists of 20 items and uses a Likert five point scale ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree", covering four aspects: writing knowledge recognition, cognitive development, problem-solving ability, and prompt methods. Qian et al. (2023) designed a paraphrasing concept questionnaire to explore the development of learners' paraphrasing ability under the blended learning mode of DA and SPOC[50]. The questionnaire consists of three parts: personal information, self-assessment of paraphrasing concept development status, and open-ended questions. The first two parts agree to use the Likert five point scale. The purpose of open-ended questions is to allow students to describe their learning experience, comments and suggestions for the course in as much detail as possible.

In addition to the above two methods, some scholars have also used stimulated recall, which is relatively rare in the field of second language teaching. Miri et al. (2017) explored the insights that learners derive when serving as secondary interactants in the G-DA process[46]. To provide a more detailed description of how two groups of learners responded and participated in classroom conversations, one researcher conducted a semi-structured interview immediately after the post-test. Afterwards, the researchers used stimulated recall to gain a more detailed understanding of learners' experiences during the G-DA process by watching videos of their participation in class and commenting on their behavior at that time. As a result, it was found that a considerable number of students in the concurrent G-DA group indicated that they became active receivers through verbal and nonverbal participation, while the learners in the cumulative group had lower levels of positivity than those in the concurrent group. In other words, the learners in the cumulative group did not actively notice and internalize the information exchanged between the main interactants at the social level.

Overall, the above research helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of learners' evaluations and attitudes towards DA, as well as their satisfaction with the implementation processes of DA. Obtaining such information and data through methods such as questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews, and stimulated recall can help researchers construct, modify, and improve the implementation process of DA and G-DA, verify the applicability of them to learners of different levels, and develop teaching plans that are suitable for the teaching characteristics and personal characteristics of students in different regions. However, few studies have explored the underlying reasons behind participants' attitudes.

5. Conclusion and Prospect

To sum up, the research on DA and G-DA in the field of second language teaching abroad has been in a booming state, which shows that researchers attach importance to dynamic assessment and its related theoretical research. However, the research on G-DA in China is not yet extensive, and future researchers need to conduct more rigorous theoretical and applied research in the field of English teaching, incorporating the learning situation of Chinese learners. From the perspective of research time, domestic research on G-DA started later than foreign research; From the perspective of research content, foreign studies mainly focus on oral communication, writing, listening, and vocabulary, with less research in the field of reading, while domestic research in various aspects is relatively scarce. From the perspective of research objects, the research objects of empirical research at home and abroad are mainly college students, and the DA and G-DA research for junior and senior high school students is relatively scarce. Therefore, the framework of dynamic assessment classroom for middle school students is not perfect.

In the future, the application of group dynamic assessment in second language writing instruction can be further developed in the following directions:

First, in-depth exploration of group dynamic assessment itself. On one hand, this involves addressing questions about group size and composition: What is the optimal number of groups and group members to achieve the best teaching outcomes? Should grouping follow the principle of homogeneity among members, or should each group include learners of high, medium, and low proficiency levels? These issues warrant further investigation. On the other hand, group dynamic assessment impacts learners of varying ability levels differently, yet few studies have explored the underlying reasons. Future researchers could delve into this perspective.

Second, large-scale empirical research. As previously mentioned, existing studies on group dynamic assessment primarily focus on college students. Future researchers could expand the scope to include primary and secondary school students and other populations, thereby enriching empirical findings. With the advancement of educational big data, researchers will gain access to more empirical data, enabling large-scale, longitudinal studies to verify the long-term effects of group dynamic assessment across diverse groups.

Third, rational utilization of technological assistance. With the development of information technology, the application of online collaboration platforms and intelligent assessment tools will further enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of group dynamic assessment. For online collaboration, platforms such as *Tencent Meeting*, *DingTalk*, and other social software with video/voice call features can facilitate online group dynamic assessment, freeing teachers from time and location constraints. Regarding intelligent tools, future researchers should leverage computer-related expertise to develop software that automatically provides interventions and support to learners based on group dynamic assessment protocols, thereby promoting its broader adoption.

Fourth, diversified teaching applications. With appropriate technological integration, group dynamic assessment can extend beyond traditional classrooms to online education, blended learning, and other instructional models, catering to diverse learner needs. For instance, Shokoufeh and Saman (2019) compared the effects of computer-mediated dynamic assessment and face-to-face interventions[34]. Similarly, future studies could conduct empirical comparisons between computer-mediated dynamic assessment and blended learning models, or between blended learning and non-dynamic assessment approaches. Findings from such research could guide the selection of suitable instructional models for different learner groups.

Acknowledgement

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