An Investigation of the Impact of Concurrent Group Dynamic Assessment on EFL Learners' Achievement of Phrasal Verbs at Productive Level

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the impact of the concurrent group dynamic assessment on the learning of phrasal verbs at a productive level. The participants of the study were 30 EFL learners at an intermediate level of language proficiency. The participants' productive knowledge of the phrasal verbs was measured before and after the treatment through a researcher-made test including 80 items. For the purpose of the study, paired and independent samples t-test were utilized. Results of statistical analyses indicated that concurrent group dynamic assessment was significantly effective in the achievement of phrasal verbs at a productive level. Moreover, it was found that no significant difference existed in the concurrent group dynamic assessment in terms of the achievement of phrasal verbs at a productive level.

Keywords: *assessment, concurrent, dynamic assessment, EFL, Phrasal Verbs, Productive Level,*

INTRODUCTION

Basically speaking, assessment is considered as the most significant in all educational settings. Thus, it is a factor that has an influential impact on the language teaching and learning process. According to Backman (2004), assessment is "a process of collecting information about something that we are interested in" (p. 6-7). When an assessment does not meet the requirements and the opportunities of both students and teachers, it may hinder the learning process.

Given that assessment sets the schedule more influentially than any syllabus or course outline; therefore, it is one of the most important effects on the students' experience of higher education (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). As a matter of fact, assessment is considered as an essential feature in education relying on the popularity of student-oriented learning which demands alternative techniques of assessment to assess teaching and learning. Lantolf and Pohner (2004) claim "Dynamic Assessment (DA) is rooted in Vygotsky's writing on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and it has been widely researched in psychology and education" (p. 49). They continue that DA is different from

other approaches to assessment since mediation of the examinees' performance during the assessment procedure is crucial for their understanding.

Vygotsky (1997) suggests that mediation can be achieved through three ways including the use of some material tools, interaction with another person, or the use of symbols. However, (Lantolf, 2000), asserts mediation can occur by others in social interaction, by self through private speech, and by artifact. According to Lantolf & Pohner (2004) "dynamic assessment is commonly described according to the type of mediated assessment provided to learners to attain their goal" (p. 54). To decide on which DA approach best fit a particular context requires to take into consideration whether the main focus is on the learners' abilities or their development.

According to Xiaoxio and Yan (2010), dynamic assessment assesses the true potential of learners that extends the interactive nature of learning to the process of assessment. To this aim, the teacher and learner come into a dialogue to understand the students' current level of performance on any task and share the possible solution.

In dynamic assessment, learners' interactions with others are taken not as a context for development to occur, but they are considered as the sources necessary for development. While learners continuously face complex problems, their performance, and the mediation they require as well as how they respond to this mediation are carefully monitored. In this way, the issue is learner development from one dynamic assessment interaction to the next.

Based on what Lantolf and Poehner (2004) claim, DA integrates assessment and instruction to make unified activity to promote learner development through appropriate forms of mediation that are sensitive to the individuals' current abilities. They continue "DA is a procedure for simultaneously assessing and prompting development that takes account of the individual's (or group's) zone of proximal development" (Lantolf & Poehner, p. 50).

According to Poehner (2009), concurrent group dynamic assessment is a kind of dynamic assessment in which the teacher engages two students as primary and secondary interactions in his/her interaction offering his/her meditating support. Thus, the teacher encourages the development of each individual by acting within the group's ZPD. To do this, the operationalization of this procedure is carried out when the teacher asks one of the students to say the right answer. Accordingly, if the first student cannot answer the question correctly, the teacher will provide mediation. Then he/she repeats the wrong answer in a question form and calls on a different student. The process will be continued among the students to reformulate the response (Pohner, 2009, as cited in Davin, 2011).

Generally speaking, dynamic assessment has also been applied with second-language learners without issues of determining their needs for educational services (Kozulin & Garb, 2002). To this aim, Kozulin and Garb (2002) conducted a study on young Israeli adults. They modified a standardized test as a pretest and for the posttest, another form of this standardized test was designed. During the mediation phase, teacher-assessors were taught to help the students through strategies related both to the needs of the test and the nature of the students' errors on the pretest. According to the study, differences in scores from pretest to posttest goes beyond one standard deviation. Moreover, it showed a negative correlation between gain and pretest scores.

Anton (2003) used dynamic assessment as a diagnostic test on reading and writing of English advance learners, whose native language was Spanish. In the pre-test, she asked the students to write a paragraph on a specific topic, and in the second phase, she let them use their dictionaries and grammar handbook as an artifact for mediation and

revise what they wrote in the first phase. She concluded that those learners who were less knowledgeable revised more frequently compared to more knowledgeable learners. Therefore, she concluded that weaker learners benefited from dynamic assessment more compared to knowledgeable learners.

Given that different investigations in the history of English literature have been employed to provide an appropriate definition for phrasal verbs (Anna & Schmitt, 2007). According to Francis (1958), a phrasal verb is considered as a separable verb. Based on what Siyanova and Schmitt (2007) argue, it is a verb which consists of two words; however, Fraser (1974) clarifies it as a verb-particle combination.

Critically speaking, the phrasal verb has been studied mostly by the investigators (Gardner & Davies, 2007) and is the particular term that has been implicated in teaching and educational environments such as dictionaries, textbooks, and course books. The grammatical construction of phrasal verbs whether in the prepositional or adverbial particle is naturally problematic.

Given that distinguishing the difference between a preposition and prepositional particle is crucial in language teaching and learning. Phrasal verbs are introduced as the combination of lexical verbs and adverb particle or lexical verb and preposition (Quirk, 1985). In phrasal verbs the elements are separable (Please switch off the TV); however, elements in prepositional verbs are inseparable (She went down the street).

In an attempt by Gardner and Davies (2007), they gathered the collection of the most frequent phrasal verbs which included all of the lexical verbs and adverb particles which are the majority of phrasal verbs. As Quirk (1985) argues, transitivity is the notion which needs to be emphasized while talking about phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs can appear intransitive or intransitive forms. Transitive phrasal verbs follow a direct object which is a clause or a noun where intransitive phrasal verbs are not able to take objects; thus, the verb and particle always stand together.

Although the theoretical framework of dynamic assessment was proposed by Vygotsky, he did not present any methodological guidelines for its application in real educational settings. There is a robust research literature on dynamic assessment in general education and psychology; however, the approach is relatively unknown or at least new in second/foreign language studies. The studies of dynamic assessment's implications for problems to the development of L2 abilities are only beginning by a limited number of scholars in this field. Most of these discussions have been made at the theoretical level of dynamic assessment in language education and the number of studies focusing on practical and empirical dimensions to provide guidelines of methodological applications is very limited.

One of the well-known studies in dynamic assessment is pertinent to Anton's (2009). She examined the usefulness of dynamic assessment with university students. She implemented a dynamic assessment with third-year Spanish majors on the speaking and writing portions of a diagnostic test. She concluded that dynamic assessment resulted in a deeper understanding of students' abilities.

Davin (2011) investigated the application of group DA where students studied interrogative use and formation. Results indicated that while some students moved from assisted to unassisted performance during large group DA, other students needed peer mediation offered during small group work to enhance interrogative use and formation.

Poehner (2008) in his study on advanced level adults learning French as their foreign language, played different parts of an English movie to the participants. First, learners constructed an oral narrative in the target language after watching a short video

clip. They received no mediation in the first task. Then they were shown a second clip from the same story but this time to improve the speaking ability of these French learning, they received hints, leading questions, suggestions, and explicit feedback when constructing their oral narratives. The assessment which focused on the performance differences between the first and second tests was used as the basis for an individualized instructional program in which participants were tutored in areas that had been identified during the dynamic assessment sessions. He concluded that the mediation resulted in an improved understanding of these two tests and aspects for the students.

Another researcher, Ableeva (2008) also used dynamic assessment with university students learning French. She aimed at promoting the development of listening comprehension skills and found that the differences in learners' difficulties on an assessment revealed their unique ZPDs, which is not revealed in the non-dynamic pre-test. According to her, employing dynamic assessment in reading and listening comprehension classrooms makes it possible for both learners and their teachers to identify the probable sources of problems that might hinder text comprehension.

Naeni and Duvall (2012) in an attempt, used a mixed-method to study the improvements in reading comprehension performance of 10 university students by applying the mediation of dynamic assessment approach to instruction and assessment. The mediation phase of their study included three-interception sessions each on one particular reading comprehension sub-skills. Their findings revealed significant improvement in the reading comprehension performance of the participants after the mediation.

Gharekani and Seyyed Rezaei (2015) aimed at investigating the effect of dynamic assessment on vocabulary learning and retention among 40 Iranian elementary students. The research was done in three stages including the pretest, dynamic assessment, and post-test. The result showed a significant difference between the two groups. Finally, a beneficial effect of dynamic assessment for EFL learners' retention was found in the study.

Birjandi, Daftarifard, and Lange (2011) investigated whether it is possible to distinguish the quantitative and qualitative effects of dynamic assessment on the items and persons. The dynamic assessment data gathered from 42 Iranian university students showed the anticipated quantitative improvement in learners' performance on the posttest relative to the pretest for the wh-type questions as well as for scanning items. But clear qualitative effects were not found, because the item and person hierarchies were almost the same for the pre-and post-tests. The rating scale formulation proved to be a useful measure of ZPD as it proved to be a proper tool for capturing the pre- and post-test dynamic assessment simultaneously.

Relying on the importance of phrasal verbs and the potentiality of dynamic assessment in a general and concurrent group dynamic assessment, in particular, the present study aimed at investigating the impact of the concurrent group dynamic assessment on learning phrasal verbs at a productive level among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Considering this purpose, the main research question and hypothesis of the study are as follow:

Q1: Does concurrent group dynamic assessment have any significant impact on the achievement of phrasal verbs at a productive level among intermediate EFL learners?
H01: Concurrent group dynamic assessment does not have any significant impact on the achievement of phrasal verbs at a productive level among intermediate EFL learners.

METHOD
Participants and Instrumentation
The participants of the present study included initially 60 language learners at the intermediate level of language proficiency selected non-randomly through the convenience sampling method at Kish Language Institute. They were given a Preliminary English Test (PET). The descriptive statistics of the PET were calculated. Based on the results of mean and standard deviation, those learners whose scores lay beyond and below +/- one standard deviation from the mean were discarded. Therefore, 30 learners were excluded. Preliminary English Test was piloted first on 30 students. Then the 30 selected learners were assigned for the study.

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher utilized three instruments to measure the participants' abilities in terms of language proficiency, and phrasal verbs, i.e., PET, pre-test and post-test. In this study, the PET was used to homogenize the participants based on their general English proficiency. The test contains four skills including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It has three papers; the first paper covers reading skill with five parts and 35 questions which consist of twenty multiple-choice questions, five matching and ten true/false questions with 25 marks, and the second paper covers writing skill with three parts and seven questions which consist of five sentence transformation questions and two essays with 25 marks. The time given to these parts is around one hour and thirty minutes. The third paper covers listening skills with four parts and 25 questions, which consist of thirteen multiple-choice questions, six gap-filling and yes/no questions with 25 marks and the given time is thirty minutes. The speaking test was conducted face-to-face with one or two candidates in ten to twelve minutes.

The researcher administered a teacher/researcher-made phrasal verb test including 80 phrasal verbs before and after the treatments to evaluate the learners' degree of achievement. The students were asked to make a sentence (testing the productive level) for each item. To establish the content validity of the test, the chosen items as well as the instructions were given to two Ph.D. holders in the field of TEFL. To address another concern of the test i.e. reliability, the test was piloted on 30 participants having similar characteristics to those of the main participants, and KR-21 was employed to calculate the reliability index.

Materials.
The main course book used in this study is New Head Way Intermediate Book by Liz and John Soars, published by Oxford University Press for intermediate level. This textbook was used at Kish Language Institute for intermediate learners and contains 12 units mainly focusing on the integration of the four skills.

Design
The design of the current study was quasi-experimental as the participants were selected based on convenient non-random sampling. To be consistent with the DA group, this study drew on a sandwich model which was introduced by Sternberg and Grigorenko (as cited in Pohner, 2008). According to Pohner (2008), this model has three stages namely, pre-test, mediation, and post-test.

Procedure

In the present study, PET and the researcher-made phrasal verb test were piloted on 30 participants to assure that they were suitable for this study. To achieve the purpose of this study the researcher went through the following steps:

In the first step before administering the Preliminary English Test (PET), the researcher piloted the test on 30 intermediate students. Following that, a teacher made pretest containing 80 phrasal verb items were given to the participants. The whole treatment was 10 sessions and in each session eight of the phrasal verbs were taught. The treatment was done for 30 minutes of each session.

As mentioned earlier, the teacher provided mediation. Mediation in DA differs from the teacher's normal instruction. Davin (2011) claims "in DA the teacher provides a series of graduated prompts, arranged from implicit to explicit, to help the students solve their problems" (p. 51). To provide the ground for giving mediation, the teacher gave students some exercises. To this aim, each session the teacher focused on eight phrasal verbs. It means that students were supposed to learn eight phrasal verbs in each session.

To carry out concurrent group dynamic assessment, the teacher asked one of the students to say the right answer and if the first student could not answer the question correctly, she provided mediation (e.g. pause with a skeptical look). Then she repeated the wrong answer in a question form and called on a different student, other than the student who initiated the interaction. The process continued among the students until the correct answer was given by one of the participants.

The following example shows the implementation of the concurrent group dynamic assessment while the teacher is testing them at a productive level and provided them with some mediation prompts.

Teacher: Fill in the blanks with the appropriate phrasal verb.
T: Can you ……. my house when I'm on holiday?
      a. Look up   b. Look for   c. Look after   d. Look into
S1: Look up
T: Pause with a skeptical look
S1: Silently reflecting the confusion
T: Repeat the sentence and call on different student
S2: Look for
T: Class look for?
Ss: Confused
T: Listen to this sentence everybody: Can you take care of my cat when I'm at school?
S3: Look into?
T: Look into or look after?
S3: Look after?
T: Yes, well done. Can you look after my house when I'm on holiday?
T: Look after means take care of something or somebody. Let me give more examples:
My mom looks after my little brother.
My friend looks after my dog when I am not home. Can you make some sentences with look after, class?

Data Collection. As mentioned before, the required data in this study were collected through a pretest and posttest of phrasal verbs.

Data Analysis

A series of descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in this research. The descriptive measures included mean and standard deviation. Item analysis was also conducted on the language proficiency test used for homogenization. The reliability indices of all tests were reported together with the inter-rater reliability of the raters scoring the writing and speaking sections of PET. In this regard, Cronbach's alpha and KR-21 were applied to measure the reliability of the piloted version of PET and phrasal verb tests respectively.

FINDINGS

In the present study PET, and the researcher-made phrasal verb test was piloted on 30 participants to assure that they were suitable for the target participants of this study. Moreover, the researcher carried out the concurrent group dynamic assessment during two sessions on 30 participants having similar characteristics to those of the targeted participants to make sure that the procedures will be applicable.

Table 1. *Reliability Analysis of PET in the Pilot Study*

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PET	.831	.822	40.00	49.00	44.5000	2.83269

Table 1 shows the reliability analysis of PET in the pilot study. As seen in Table 1, PET had a reliability index of 0.83 which is quite satisfactory. The maximum score and minimum score were 49 and 40, respectively, and the mean score was 44.50 (SD = 2.83). As for the reliability of the phrasal verb test, the KR-21 procedure was utilized. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the pilot sample in terms of phrasal verb test scores.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of the Pilot Sample in Terms of Phrasal Verb Test Scores*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
PhrasalPilot	30	48.00	58.00	53.6000	2.71141	7.352
Valid N (listwise)	30					

As seen in Table 2, the pilot sample had a mean score of 53.60 (SD = 2.71) and a variance of 7.35. The minimum score was 48 and the maximum score was 58. The above statistical value was used to estimate the reliability of the phrasal verb test using KR-21.

To answer the research question related to the impact of concurrent dynamic assessment on the achievement of phrasal verbs at a productive level, the phrasal verb knowledge of language learners before and after the treatment was compared. Table 3 shows the language learners' scores in the phrasal verb test at a productive level before and after the concurrent group dynamic assessment.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for Pretest and Posttest at Productive Level for Concurrent Group Dynamic Assessment*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	30.4333	30	4.15794	.75913
	Posttest	37.2333	30	5.30246	.96809

As seen in Table 3, the mean score of the concurrent group is 30.43 (SD=4.15) before the treatment and 37.23 (SD=5.30) after the treatment. To make sure about the statistical significance of the mean differences paired samples t-test was employed. Table 4 shows the results of the paired samples t-test.

Table 4. *Results of Paired Samples t-test between Pretest and Posttest at Productive Level for Concurrent Dynamic Assessment Group*

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	pretest – posttest	-6.80000	3.26317	.59577	-8.01849	-5.58151	-11.414	29	.000

Table 4 clearly shows that the t value is 11.41 and the significant level is 0.000 which is smaller than the confidence interval of 0.05. Therefore, there was a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores for the knowledge of phrasal verbs at productive levels. Accordingly, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was concluded that concurrent group dynamic assessment has a significant and positive impact on the knowledge of phrasal verbs at a productive level.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of the concurrent group dynamic assessment on the learning of phrasal verbs at a productive level. In this study, knowledge of phrasal verbs was measured before and after the treatment. Based on the results of statistical analysis, it was found that concurrent group dynamic assessment was effective and positive on the achievement of phrasal verbs at a productive level.

The finding of the present study was in line with Gharekani and Seyyed Rezaei (2015) which aimed at investigating the effect of dynamic assessment on vocabulary learning and retention among 40 Iranian elementary EFL learners. The participants were divided into an experimental and control group. The result showed a significant difference between the two groups and showed that DA has a positive effect on learning vocabulary and retention.

The finding of the current study was also in line with Rajaeizadeh, Biria, and Kheirzadeh (2015). They worked on the instructional efficacy of DA on the English vocabulary of young Iranian EFL learners. The obtained results revealed that DA had a significant effect on learners' vocabulary development.

It is worthwhile to mention that Birjandi, Daftarifard, and Lange's study (2011) also provided similar results. They investigated whether it was possible to distinguish the quantitative and qualitative effects of dynamic assessment on the items and persons. The rating scale formation proved to be a useful measure of ZPD as it proved to be a proper tool for capturing the pretest and posttest data simultaneously.

In supporting the above- mentioned arguments, the result of this study shows that concurrent group dynamic assessment was effective in learning phrasal verbs at a productive level, it may be concluded that underlying principles of the concurrent group dynamic assessment are general learning principals that are applicable to various contexts of learning.

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