GEORGE BROWN PRESS
JOURNALS, BOOKS & PROCEEDINGS

Journal of Education, Humanities, and Social Research

Review

Dynamic Assessment in Second Language Education: A Systematic Review from Theoretical Foundations to Practical Implementations

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Abstract: Dynamic Assessment (DA), fundamentally rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT), has progressively evolved into a transformative and highly effective criterion within the broader landscape of second language education. By seamlessly integrating assessment and instruction into a unified, cohesive process, DA challenges traditional testing paradigms. This comprehensive review synthesizes existing empirical research to meticulously trace the developmental trajectory of DA, transitioning from a purely theoretical framework to highly practical implications across diverse English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Based on a rigorous analysis of contemporary studies, this paper systematically explores the underlying operational mechanisms of DA in accurately diagnosing and expanding the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This is achieved through various pedagogical strategies, including targeted teacher intervention, collaborative peer interaction, and the deployment of cutting-edge AI-driven technologies. The synthesized findings conclusively demonstrate that direct teacher mediation yields the optimal pedagogical effect, particularly in enhancing macro-level writing proficiency and translation accuracy. Conversely, peer mediation serves as an effective catalyst for promoting sustained learner autonomy and collaborative problem-solving skills. Furthermore, the strategic integration of Computerized Dynamic Assessment (CDA) alongside artificial intelligence provides a highly feasible and innovative solution to the persistent scalability challenges traditionally associated with DA implementation. Ultimately, this paper argues that a modality-integrated DA model, carefully adapted to specific instructional objectives, will significantly help educators and researchers grasp the future direction of second language assessment methodologies.

Keywords: dynamic assessment; sociocultural theory; mediation; language education; artificial intelligence

Received: 10 April 2026
Revised: 18 May 2026
Accepted: 01 June 2026
Published: 08 June 2026

1. Introduction

Second language assessment has traditionally been dominated by static psychometric models that prioritize the evaluation of outcomes over the processes involved in learning. These conventional assessment methods act as a "final judgment," categorizing learners based solely on their independent performance while overlooking their developmental potential. This static approach fails to adequately capture the dynamic progression of cognitive abilities and offers limited guidance for educators aiming to enhance learner improvement. In contrast, Dynamic Assessment (DA), rooted in Sociocultural Theory, integrates assessment and instruction into a unified framework. DA posits that educators can effectively diagnose developmental potential and tailor differentiated instruction by assessing learners' performance with targeted support, specifically within their Zone of Proximal Development [1, 2]. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding learners' capabilities in the context of their developmental trajectory, rather than relying solely on isolated performance metrics.

In recent years, Dynamic Assessment has evolved from a theoretical concept into a practical pedagogical tool, becoming a focal point of research and application. Initially, DA was predominantly applied in one-on-one clinical settings due to the intensive interaction required in its implementation. However, advancements in educational methodologies have facilitated its expansion into broader contexts [3, 4]. The studies reviewed in this paper illustrate the progression of DA from expert-led interventions to peer-mediated strategies, and further to implementations supported by artificial intelligence. This systematic review aims to analyze this developmental trajectory by examining key studies that highlight the efficacy of these mediation sources—teachers, peers, and AI. Furthermore, it explores their specific impacts on critical language skills such as writing and translation. The findings provide valuable insights into how DA can be adapted to diverse classroom environments, including those with limited resources. By synthesizing these research outcomes, this review seeks to guide educators in leveraging DA to foster more effective and inclusive teaching practices, ensuring that learners receive tailored support that aligns with their individual developmental needs.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings and Methodological Frameworks

Before analyzing specific applications of DA in some existing studies, it is essential to clarify the theoretical foundations that distinguish DA from traditional formative assessment. DA is not merely "assessment for learning" but essentially "assessment as learning." It is based on the premise that cognitive abilities are not fixed traits but are instead malleable through social interaction. The core principle of DA lies in the distinction between the Actual Development Level, which reflects learners' independent performance, and the Potential Development Level, which represents performance achieved with external assistance [5, 6]. This distinction underscores the dynamic nature of learning and emphasizes the importance of guided interaction in fostering cognitive development. By focusing on the interplay between these two levels, DA provides a framework for understanding how learners can progress beyond their current capabilities through structured support.

Interventionist DA and Interactionist DA are two dominant methodological frameworks in DA research [7]. The interventionist approach is commonly applied in standardized testing and employs a pre-designed hierarchical prompt system that ranges from implicit to explicit cues. This structured approach is particularly efficient for large-scale administration, as it allows for uniformity and scalability. However, it often lacks the flexibility needed to interpret the nuanced cognitive processes of individual learners. In contrast, the interactionist approach is primarily utilized in classroom-based research and emphasizes dialogic engagement between mediators, such as teachers or peers, and learners. This approach involves providing contingent scaffolding tailored to the learners' immediate needs, with the ultimate goal of gradually withdrawing support as learners internalize the target skills. By prioritizing real-time interaction and adaptability, the interactionist approach offers a more personalized and responsive framework for understanding and supporting learning processes.

Building on these frameworks, the "sandwich" model has been identified as a common methodological design in prior studies. This model divides the assessment process into three distinct sections: Pre-test, Mediation, and Post-test. By comparing learners' independent performance before and after the mediation phase, researchers can identify the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which represents the gap between what learners can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance. This model not only highlights the dynamic nature of learning but also provides a structured approach to measuring developmental progress. Furthermore, DA shifts the focus from learning outcomes to the learning process itself. Unlike traditional feedback mechanisms, which often prioritize providing correct answers, DA adopts a mediated learning approach. This approach emphasizes the cultivation of learners' metacognitive strategies, enabling them to develop independent problem-solving skills. By fostering

these strategies, DA aims to empower learners to take an active role in their own cognitive development, thereby promoting long-term educational growth.

3. A Comparative Analysis of Mediation Efficacy

A central controversy in dynamic assessment (DA) research revolves around the selection of mediation sources, which significantly influence learning outcomes. While Vygotsky emphasized the importance of guidance from a More Knowledgeable Other, contemporary educational environments often rely on peer or technological mediation due to practical constraints such as limited resources and increasing class sizes. Peer mediation fosters collaborative learning and social interaction, enabling students to develop critical thinking skills through shared experiences. Technological mediation, on the other hand, offers scalability and personalized learning opportunities, leveraging adaptive algorithms and interactive platforms to cater to diverse learner needs. Existing studies suggest a clear hierarchy in the efficacy of these modalities, with each fulfilling distinct roles within the broader learning ecosystem. For instance, peer mediation may excel in fostering interpersonal skills, while technological tools often provide consistent and data-driven support for individualized learning trajectories [7].

3.1. Teacher Intervention and Expert Mediation

Teacher intervention has consistently demonstrated superiority over other methods in enhancing the quality of complex language output. In translation teaching, studies have shown that teacher-mediated interventions significantly improve the coherence and accuracy of translations. This advantage is attributed to teachers' ability to address macro-level issues, such as textual logical relationships and cultural connotations, which often exceed the capabilities of peer mediators. Teachers possess a comprehensive understanding of both linguistic and cultural nuances, enabling them to provide precise guidance that fosters deeper comprehension and skill development. Furthermore, their expertise allows them to identify and rectify subtle errors that might otherwise go unnoticed, ensuring that learners achieve a higher standard of proficiency in their translations [6]. This structured and expert-driven approach not only enhances immediate learning outcomes but also equips students with the tools to independently tackle complex translation challenges in the future.

Similarly, in academic writing instruction, expert-led individualized enrichment has been shown to yield superior results. Learners who receive tailored instruction based on diagnostic assessments achieve greater improvements in independent writing compared to those who undergo conventional instruction. This approach, informed by a precise understanding of learners' emerging abilities, serves as a powerful catalyst for cognitive development. Teachers, with their holistic grasp of disciplinary knowledge, are uniquely positioned to identify and address gaps in logic, rhetoric, and genre conventions that learners and peers often overlook. By providing targeted feedback and structured guidance, they enable students to refine their writing skills and develop a more nuanced understanding of academic conventions. This method not only enhances the immediate quality of learners' work but also fosters long-term growth by equipping them with the critical thinking and analytical skills necessary for academic success [8]. The emphasis on individualized attention ensures that instruction is tailored to the specific needs of each learner, maximizing the effectiveness of the educational process.

3.2. Peer Intervention and Learner Autonomy

Although peer mediation is less effective than teacher mediation in optimizing the quality of the final product, it holds unique significance in promoting learner autonomy and enhancing metacognitive awareness. A notable distinction exists in the nature of feedback effects [2]. While learners tend to incorporate more teacher feedback into their revisions, peer feedback often prompts a greater proportion of meaning-oriented revisions rather than superficial corrections. This indicates that peers, who share similar proficiency levels, encourage writers to critically evaluate their ideas and arguments instead of focusing solely on grammatical accuracy. Such interactions foster a deeper

engagement with the content, enabling learners to refine their conceptual understanding and improve their ability to articulate complex ideas effectively.

Furthermore, peer mediation plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of learning ownership among students. Learners frequently experience heightened anxiety during teacher-led interventions, which can hinder their ability to experiment and learn from mistakes. In contrast, peer interactions provide a low-pressure environment that encourages trial and error, thereby reducing the affective filter and promoting a more relaxed and productive learning atmosphere. Additionally, peer feedback has been shown to enhance translation accuracy and is often preferred by learners due to its collaborative and supportive nature. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of peer mediation, particularly in terms of comprehensiveness and rhetorical sophistication. Despite these constraints, peer mediation serves as a valuable scaffold that stimulates active participation, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. By engaging in peer feedback, learners not only develop their analytical skills but also cultivate a deeper understanding of the subject matter, which ultimately contributes to their overall academic growth and independence [9].

3.3. AI and Computerized Dynamic Assessment

The traditional interactionist Dynamic Assessment (DA) model has proven to be highly effective in fostering individualized learning and cognitive development. However, its implementation is notably labor-intensive, requiring significant teacher involvement and personalized feedback, which poses challenges in scaling the approach for larger classes or educational settings with limited resources. To address these limitations, recent advancements have introduced Computerized Dynamic Assessment (CDA) and artificial intelligence (AI) as transformative solutions. These technologies enable automated and adaptive assessment processes, reducing the dependency on human intervention while maintaining the core principles of DA. By leveraging AI algorithms, CDA systems can analyze learner responses in real-time, offering tailored feedback and scaffolding that aligns with each student's unique needs. This shift represents a critical evolution in educational methodologies, enhancing accessibility and efficiency in diverse learning environments.

3.3.1. Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) and Human-Computer Symbiosis

In writing instruction, technological integration is exemplified through Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems [10]. One such system, Pigai Wang, has been analyzed by comparing the effectiveness of teacher feedback, AWE-only feedback, and a hybrid approach combining both. The analysis highlights a fundamental limitation of AWE systems. While these systems demonstrate proficiency in addressing micro-level linguistic mechanics, such as grammar and vocabulary, they are unable to assess more nuanced rhetorical qualities. These include the evaluation of content depth, coherence, and the organization of discourse, which are critical for effective communication and academic writing. This limitation underscores the need for human intervention in areas where machines fall short, particularly in evaluating complex and subjective aspects of writing that require contextual understanding and critical judgment.

Despite these limitations, the hybrid mediation model has been shown to be highly effective. By combining teacher intervention with AWE systems, an optimal pedagogical framework emerges. This approach does not aim to replace teachers but rather redefines their roles within the instructional process. Teachers can delegate the task of superficial error correction, such as addressing grammatical and vocabulary issues, to AWE systems. This allows educators to focus their efforts on fostering higher-order thinking skills, such as critical analysis, argumentation, and the development of complex rhetorical strategies. These are areas where human expertise remains indispensable. The integration of technology in this manner not only enhances the efficiency of writing instruction but also ensures that students receive comprehensive support in developing both technical and conceptual writing skills. This symbiotic relationship between humans and machines

represents a forward-thinking model for modern education, where technology complements rather than competes with human capabilities.

3.3.2. AI-Powered Personalization and Cognitive Modeling

In addition to basic grammar error checking, AI facilitates the modeling of intricate learning dynamics by constructing mathematical representations of learners' evolving knowledge states. One innovative framework introduces the concept of a knowledge state vector, denoted as J(t), which is updated in real time based on individual performance metrics. This dynamic approach allows AI systems to act as mediators, adjusting task difficulty levels and scaffolding strategies through the application of differential equations that model cognitive load. By continuously monitoring and adapting to learners' needs, these systems optimize the educational experience, ensuring that tasks remain challenging yet achievable, thereby fostering sustained engagement and effective learning outcomes.

A quasi-experimental study demonstrates the transformative potential of AI-driven dynamic adaptation (DA) in educational settings. The experimental group utilizing AI-driven DA exhibits a remarkable 25% improvement in performance and a 15% increase in engagement compared to the control group. This underscores the capability of AI to simulate the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) within digital environments, enabling timely feedback to maintain learners in an optimal flow state. Such advancements signify a pivotal shift in educational technology, where DA transcends traditional limitations imposed by teacher availability. By leveraging AI, personalized learning pathways can be universally accessible, ensuring that every learner receives tailored support to maximize their potential. This technological evolution not only enhances individual learning experiences but also paves the way for scalable, equitable education systems in the future.

4. Synthesis and Pedagogical Implications

The synthesis of these selected studies underscores the necessity of adopting a multi-dimensional approach to dynamic assessment (DA) in modern language teaching practices. Effective implementation of DA requires a hierarchical support system that enables educators to tailor their mediation strategies to the diverse needs of students, varying teaching objectives, and specific lesson types. Teachers must carefully evaluate the conditions of their classrooms, including the individual characteristics of learners, the complexity of tasks, and the overarching goals of the curriculum. By doing so, they can select appropriate mediation modalities that align with these variables, ensuring that the instructional process remains adaptive and responsive. Furthermore, the integration of DA into pedagogical frameworks highlights the importance of flexibility and innovation in teaching methodologies, fostering an environment where students can achieve optimal learning outcomes through personalized and context-sensitive interventions.

4.1. A Framework for Feedback Modalities

A practical framework for selecting feedback modalities can be developed by synthesizing existing theoretical and empirical insights. This framework aims to provide a structured approach to determining the most effective feedback methods for various contexts, ensuring that they align with the specific needs of learners or participants. By categorizing feedback modalities based on their characteristics, such as immediacy, specificity, and delivery format, the framework facilitates a systematic evaluation of their potential impact. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of tailoring feedback to the unique requirements of different educational or professional environments. Table 1 provides a detailed representation of this framework, offering a visual guide to its application and utility in diverse scenarios.

Table 1. A Practical Framework of Feedback Modality

Teacher Feedback	Macro-level competencies Content, organization, rhetorical strategies, coherence	The most authoritative and effective modality	The most resource-consuming
Peer Feedback	Learner autonomy and meaning-level issues	Reduce affective anxiety and cultivate critical evaluation skills.	Lack depth and human touch
AI Feedback	Micro-level linguistic mechanics Grammar, spelling, vocabulary	Provide instant, non-judgmental corrections	Suffer from bias and unreliability

4.2. The "Sandwich" Model in Practice

The sandwich format is recognized as a highly effective and structured approach within the framework of dynamic assessment (DA). This model emphasizes a systematic process that integrates assessment and instruction, ensuring that learners receive targeted support while their progress is continuously monitored. By adopting this format, educators can create a more interactive and responsive learning environment, where the focus shifts from merely evaluating outcomes to fostering deeper understanding and skill development. The sandwich model's structured nature ensures that learners are not only assessed at the beginning and end of a teaching unit but also receive meaningful interventions throughout the process. This approach aligns with the principles of formative assessment, where the goal is to enhance learning rather than simply measure it. Figure 1 illustrates the sandwich format, providing a visual representation of its layered structure. This model encourages educators to engage in reflective practices, adapting their teaching strategies to meet the evolving needs of their students, thereby promoting a more inclusive and effective educational experience.

Figure 1. The Sandwich Format

The sandwich model facilitates the identification of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) at the outset of a teaching unit, enabling educators to tailor their instructional strategies to the specific needs of their students [1]. By the conclusion of the unit, this model allows for a comprehensive evaluation of skill internalization, ensuring that learning objectives have been met. This paradigm requires educators to transition from traditional grading practices to diagnostic approaches that prioritize understanding over rote memorization. The integration of mediated dialogues, such as one-on-one conferences, peer review sessions, and AI-driven interactions, plays a pivotal role in this process. These dialogues serve as platforms for learners to actively engage with content, refine their skills, and receive constructive feedback. By embedding these practices into the teaching process, educators can address multiple skill areas simultaneously, fostering a more holistic development of learners. This shift underscores the importance of dynamic and adaptive teaching methodologies in modern education.

4.3. Translation Pedagogy and Structured Scaffolding

In translation teaching, the necessity of peer mediation training is emphasized. Without structured training through mediation strategy tables, peers often concentrate excessively on narrow linguistic details, which can hinder the broader development of translation skills. This lack of focus on holistic aspects of translation, such as cultural nuances and contextual appropriateness, can result in suboptimal learning outcomes. Structured mediation training provides a framework that encourages students to engage

with translation tasks more comprehensively, fostering critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving. By guiding peers to address not only linguistic accuracy but also the logical flow and cultural relevance of translated texts, educators can significantly enhance the quality of peer interactions and the overall learning process. This approach ensures that students develop a deeper understanding of translation as a multifaceted skill, rather than merely a mechanical process of converting words from one language to another (As shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Mediation Strategy Tables

Strategy Prompt	Mediator intervention Alert
Strategy 1	Analyze the genre of the original text and supplement relevant background cultural knowledge.
Strategy 2	Analyze the difficult and key points of the analysis.
Strategy 3	Identify areas that need revision by rereading the translation.
Strategy 4	Highlight issues at both macro and micro levels, prompting learners to consider how to make improvements
Strategy 5	Provide translation techniques to help them revise their translation.
Strategy 6	Provide revision suggestions and explain the reasons for the shortcomings in the translation if the learner's revised translation falls short of expectations.

This highlights that complex skills, such as translation and academic writing, require carefully designed scaffolding to ensure effective learning. Teachers should avoid assigning unguided peer review tasks, as these often lead to superficial feedback that fails to address deeper issues in the work. Instead, educators should provide specific mediation strategies, such as identifying logical connectors, evaluating the appropriateness of cultural references, and ensuring the coherence of ideas. These strategies serve as a regulatory framework that guides peer interactions, enabling students to provide constructive and targeted feedback. By incorporating structured scaffolding into the learning process, teachers can help students develop the ability to critically analyze and refine their work. This approach not only improves the quality of peer reviews but also fosters the development of essential skills that are transferable to professional and academic contexts. Such structured methods are indispensable for cultivating advanced competencies in translation and writing [11, 12].

5. Discussion and Future Directions

The above statements outline a clear developmental trajectory of dynamic assessment (DA), transitioning from expert-led models to group-based approaches, and further evolving into technology-mediated frameworks. While advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have demonstrated significant potential in designing personalized learning paths, human intervention remains indispensable for addressing complex language tasks that require nuanced understanding. Key findings regarding the efficacy of mediation are summarized as follows, emphasizing the unique contributions of different mediators in the learning process [13, 14].

1. Teachers play a pivotal role in diagnosing and facilitating higher-order cognitive processes, such as rhetoric, coherence, and cultural connotations. Their expertise enables learners to navigate intricate linguistic challenges and develop a deeper understanding of language use in diverse contexts.
2. Peers contribute significantly to fostering learner autonomy and enhancing meta-cognitive awareness. By acting as "critical friends," they provide constructive feedback and encourage reflective practices, which are essential for independent learning and self-regulation.
3. AI and computer-driven dynamic assessment (CDA) address scalability challenges effectively, offering solutions for large-scale educational contexts. However, these

systems often lack the sophistication required to tackle rhetorical and creative dimensions of language, highlighting the need for further refinement in their design and application.

Despite the promising advancements in DA research, several limitations persist. One major challenge is the reliance on small sample sizes in interactionist DA studies, which stems from the intensive nature of their implementation. Additionally, while AI demonstrates considerable potential, the "black box" problem in algorithmic decision-making raises concerns about transparency and accountability in educational applications. Future research should prioritize the development of Explainable AI systems capable of justifying their scaffolding strategies in a clear and accessible manner. Longitudinal studies are also essential to evaluate the long-term retention of skills acquired through various DA modalities [3]. Furthermore, exploring the interaction between human and artificial mediators offers a promising avenue for enhancing the effectiveness of DA frameworks, potentially leading to more integrated and adaptive learning environments.

6. Conclusion

Dynamic Assessment has undergone significant transformation, evolving from a theoretical critique of traditional testing methodologies into a robust, evidence-based pedagogical framework for second language education. This approach leverages the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to facilitate targeted interventions that promote learner growth. The effectiveness of Dynamic Assessment is contingent upon the source of mediation, which follows a hierarchical logic rather than arbitrary selection. Teacher-led Dynamic Assessment remains the gold standard for addressing complex linguistic skills, such as argumentative writing and ensuring coherence in translation tasks, due to the nuanced understanding and expertise teachers bring to these areas. Complementary approaches, including AI-mediated and peer-mediated Dynamic Assessment, play a pivotal role in fostering learner autonomy and enabling large-scale implementation. These modalities are particularly effective for foundational language skills and collaborative learning environments, where learners benefit from shared scaffolding and iterative feedback. By integrating these diverse sources of mediation, educators can create a more inclusive and adaptive framework for second language acquisition.

The future of second language assessment lies in the adoption of the Blended Dynamic Assessment model, which represents a balanced and integrated system designed to optimize learner development. In this model, artificial intelligence systems are tasked with diagnosing and remediating basic linguistic competencies, thereby freeing cognitive resources for higher-order tasks. Peer-mediated scaffolding facilitates collaborative idea generation and iterative revision processes, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility among learners. Expert teachers, meanwhile, focus on guiding learners through high-level cognitive challenges, such as mastering advanced linguistic structures and achieving creative expression. This strategic integration of modalities ensures that assessment transcends its traditional role as a terminal judgment, transforming instead into a dynamic process that serves as a springboard for continuous learner development. Future research should explore the scalability of this model, particularly in diverse educational contexts, and investigate the potential for integrating emerging technologies, such as adaptive learning algorithms and virtual reality environments, to further enhance the efficacy of Blended Dynamic Assessment.

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