



Difficulties in Learning ‘Cohesive ties’ in English, Dynamic Assessment and Integrated Mediation Strategy (A systematic review)

Ahmed Khawaji

King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah-Saudi Arabia

Email: akhawaji@kau.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

Learning English can sometimes be challenging especially in a place where it is not a *lingua franca*. Since the learners are unable to grab any good opportunity to practice target language, they face difficulties in productive skills: speaking and writing. Among many other crucial problems, ‘Cohesive ties’ are considered as quite crucial. The proposed study is a modest attempt towards studying the nature, types and causes of learning difficulties in the area of the cohesive ties. It is also suggested as to how evolution of a compatible technology mediated mediation strategy for learning and teaching of the English language elements with special reference to cohesive ties. As we know teaching strategy can’t be fruitful unless we diagnose learning strategy, therefore in this systematic review, Dynamic Assessment (DA) will be studied to explore its benefits.

Keywords: Cohesive ties, technology, learning difficulties, mediation strategy, assessment.



1. Introduction

Teaching and assessment are inseparable from each other. If assessment is not appropriate and accurate, teaching outcomes may be doubtful. Therefore, there is always a need to look beyond traditional mode of testing which may test knowledge or memorization, but not the skills and learning process. Similarly, that test may not recommend effective teaching mode. In that case, a fruitful strategy of teaching and assessment need to be evolved.

The study explores possible effect of Dynamic assessment (DA) on the learning of cohesive ties to develop writing ability through mediation strategy. DA is nothing but a novel method of teaching English language that is used for assessment and instruction at the same time. Besides it is a more effective in EFL classrooms because it is an 'on- going' and 'formative' process of assessment along with suitable instructions that can be used according to teachers' interest and expertise to meet the learners' needs.

In Dynamic Assessment (DA), 'mediation' can only be implemented in a systematic manner. Therefore, the application of DA can be proven successful only if the instructor is prepared to utilize and assess the effectiveness of the modern model of teaching-testing. Many researchers/evaluators don't find DA conducive because there is not a summative score like its counterpart tests. To do this, an evaluator must do the dynamic assessment task with typically developing learner group.

Dynamic assessment (DA) as a skill-oriented activity, integrated with the novel idea of 'mediation' by the concerned teacher during the assessment, is a better option expected to be more result-oriented and effective. Therefore, DA is recommended by some modern researchers as paradigm shift in the testing perspective which does not ignore the teaching aspect considering that testing is a tool of teaching and can't be separated.

Dynamic assessment (DA) can be defined as "an interaction between an examiner-as-intervener and a learner-as-active participant, which seeks to estimate the degree of modifiability of the learner and the means by which positive changes in cognitive functioning can be induced and maintained" as Lidz (cited in Poehner, 2008,p13).

Poehner and Lantolf (2005) theoretically associate DA with explicit cognitive development. In addition, it can be argued that the negotiation of mediation strived to develop the skill of learners is the defining characteristic of DA. In DA, 'mediation' can only be implemented in a systematic manner. Organization, vocabulary, and content are examples of language aspects we can assess in writing. Nonetheless, this study primarily focuses on the grammatical aspects of essay writing, particularly the importance of cohesive ties.

Dynamic assessment (DA) is an assessment method that is based on a "test-teach-retest" model. The concept emphasizes the learners' ability to acquire the skills/knowledge through the target instruction. DA can be done in a structured manner. It is often viewed as a contrast to traditional and routine mode of assessment as in DA the focus is on skills and knowledge gained prior to the evaluation.



2. Theoretical Background

Three concepts have been discussed one after other in order of significance and need of the study.

2.1. Cohesive ties defined

Cohesive ties can be defined as those words that are generic in nature or phrases used to create a connection between different parts (e.g., paragraphs, sections, or sentences) of a piece of writing (Khalaf, 2020). The importance of such points can never be minimized as an instructor or a teaching faculty. They both can teach their students how to use such grammatical features in writing a text better and more effectively. A linguistic awareness of cohesive ties will lead to better communication.

Examples:

Listing words	Example words	Generalizing category	Reformulation words
first, second, third	for example	in general	in other words
first, furthermore, finally	for instance	Generally	rather
to begin, to conclude	as follows:	on the whole	to put it more simply
Next	that is	as a rule	
	in this case	for the most part	
	Namely	in most cases	
	in other words	Usually	

In addition to the above examples, following are very significant and related to this study.

Highlighting	Reinforcement	Result/consequence	Highlighting
in particular	Also	So	in particular
Particularly	Furthermore	Therefore	particularly
Especially	Moreover	as a result/consequence	especially
Mainly	what is more	Accordingly	mainly
	in addition	Consequently	Reformulation
	Besides	because of this/that	in other words
	above all	Thus	rather
	as well (as)	Hence	to put it more simply
	in the same way	for this/that reason	
		so that	



In order to make the writing effective and expressive, there are other expressions which need to be learnt properly to write clearly. Here are some examples:

Transition to new point	Similarity	Expressing an alternative	Reformulation
now,	Equally	Alternatively	in other words
as far as x is concerned	Likewise	Rather	rather
with regard/reference to	Similarly	on the other hand	to put it more simply
as for ...	Correspondingly	the alternative is	
it follows that	in the same way	another possibility would be	
turning to			
Summary	Transition to new point	Contrast	Deduction
in conclusion	now,	Instead	then
to conclude	as far as x is concerned	Conversely	Put differently
in brief	with regard/reference to	on the contrary	in that case
to summarize	as for ...	in contrast	otherwise
Overall	it follows that	in comparison	this implies that ...
Therefore	turning to		if so/not
Stating the obvious		Concession (sth unexpected)	
Obviously		However	
Clearly		even though	
Naturally		however much	
of course		Nevertheless	
as can be expected		Still	
Surely		Yet	

2.2. Concept and Role of Dynamic Assessment

The idea of dynamic assessment is not new; however, educators started focusing on the concept quite recently. Back in 1930s, Andre Rey (Swiss Psychologist) proposed such as assessment based on the assessment of abilities of the learners. Similar concept was later focused even by a famous psychologist Lev Vygotsky and Feurstein in the field of assessment of cognitive functions (Cited in Kozulin & Garb, 2002).



The proposal was taken positively due to the reason that the traditional mode of assessment tried to elicit the level of current knowledge(already existing) using summative testing. On the other hand, DA facilitates the evaluators to assess the ability of the student to learn in an on-going and interactive environment. A known study by famous researchers Vollmeyer & Rheinbreg (2002) contended that DA yielded surprising effects on learning outcomes. Kozulin & Garb (2002) tested a similar model related to DA of text comprehension.The pedagogic relevance of a DA rests on the account that it is given for a group usually in a class.However, its importance for individual's learning can also be considered.

It remains a fact to all educationists that creating and reviewing tests and providing student feedback occupy a considerable time of teachers' routine.The assessment process consumes lot of time and affects the students' mood as well. Yet, it is not so fruitful.

2.2.1.Example of items on a dynamic assessment

A teacher, for instance,might have taught different grammatical rules, such as auxiliary verbs or pronounces, and now desires to retest and reinforce learning the targeted grammatical rule.Students may need an introduction to a suitable training/testing strategy to enhancelearning.A teacher may give something like the following example as a pre-test.

Example

Where is she going?	What is his name?
a. I am not at school. b. They are going to the concert. c. She is going back home. d. Iam going home.	a. My name is John. b. His name is Sean. c. He lives in London. d. He is a kid.
Where do Ali and Qassim study?	When did he come to Jeddah?
a. They study at King Abdulaziz university. b. She studies at King Abdulaziz university. c. They are in the kitchen right now. d. They are in the canteen.	a. tomorrow b. still c. last night d. home
How often does she play baseball?	Why did you come to this class of English?
a. She played last month. b. He is playing. c. She plays every week. d. He is going to play.	a. I wanted to learn it. b. I came here. c. I have not come. d. Because I love music.



2.2.2. Technology mediated DA and teaching

Dynamic assessment can even be done without active integration of technology. However, in order to make the process more effective and result -oriented, technology in general and mobile in particular can be utilized. Andujar(2020) analyzed the characteristics of a Dynamic Assessment approach to speed up fruitful experience in an EFL/ESL classroom environment through mobile mediation technique. Students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) can be assessed in different ways. One of them is a grammar-vocabulary test. Ebadi&Saeedian (2015) studied the effects of computerized dynamic assessment on promoting EFL students' seading skills.They concluded that the unmediated pretest score may not sufficeto indicate effective lesson plan preparation and measure individuals' abilities.

3. The study

As mentioned, this study is a systematic review. Each theme has been reviewed separately. Ten studies under each head have been considered for the study. An Overlapping can be found as one study is relevant for two themes such as cohesive ties and DA. Latest studies belong to the topic have been reviewed irrespective of regions or countries.

3.1. Importance and scope

The study aims to ascertain the impactof DA on the learning of cohesive ties to develop writing ability through mediation of the instruction. It has been a misconception until the recent past that teaching and testing are two different activities, but with the pedagogic advancement, modern theories emerged so did the DA. It is a new way of teaching the English language that is used for an assessment and instruction at the same time. Besides, it is more effective in EFL classrooms because it is an 'on-going' process of assessment along with suitable instructions that can be used according to teacher 's interest and expertise to meet the learners' needs.

3.2. The statement of the research problem

Many students face difficulties in learning/using 'cohesive ties' in their compositions. To overcome such an issue,the concerned teachers have to look for a method that can diagnose students' weaknesses then mediate during the learning process till they master the specific skill so that they can use the language independently. In addition, both the teachers and learners are unable to achieve the target by the traditional mode of assessment which mainly focuses on testing student's performance without attempts to solving the issue and develop their cognitive skill in the target area. This study investigated the effect of DA of writing on rule internalization, utilizing four types of corrective feedback. The study seeks answers to the following research questions.

3.3. Research questions:

1. What are the difficulties in learning cohesive ties, and why?
2. What is the role of DA in teaching cohesive ties in English?
3. What kinds of technology mediated feedbackaremore effective in learning cohesive ties for writing?



3.4. Importance of Dynamic assessment

Dynamic assessment (DA) can be proved to be extremely significant due to many benefits that include: support in teaching, identify effective teaching strategies. DA maximizes learning potential and improves learners' understanding.

A brief description of the proposed SAMPLE test

QUESTION-1: Choose the best words:

1- The students who have finished college are _____.

(A) freshmen (B) graduates (C) children

4- If one is close to people, he will _____.

(A) live near them (B) know them very well (C) don't like them

QUESTION-2:

Identify Pros (good things) and Cons (bad things)

Decide if each statement about technology is a pro or a con.

1- A PC enables work to be done quickly . _____

2- If u spend so much time on the computers/Internet that you have no time to see your friends. _____

QUESTION-3:

Showing Causes and Effects

Rewrite each sentence using the word or phrase in parentheses.

1- Sedentary lifestyle causes poor health. (results in)

QUESTION-4: Use 'Pronouns' for Coherence:

Choose the correct **pronouns** to complete the following paragraph: 2-

(Them / Their / They) _____ hope that (it / they / he) _____ will help (them / theirs / they) _____ sell (they / their / them) _____ new products.

4. Systematic Review

The reviews for present study have been divided into 3 sub sections: Reviews related to Difficulties in learning Cohesive ties, DA and technology mediation.

4.1. Reviews related to Difficulties in learning Cohesive ties

	Author(s), year : Details in the references	Objectives/ questions	Findings
1	WidatAllah(2021)	To examine to what extent cohesive devices improve the quality of the academic writing,	The study found out that understanding of cohesive devices can support university



		to determine the problematic area which inhibits students from applying cohesive devices into academic writing, and how EFL teachers attempt to help students overcome the problems.	students in the improvement of their writing skill. The findings were in conformity with lots of works and researches carried out across the globe, particularly in Arab countries.
2	Al-Jarf(2001)	To identify different kinds of cohesive ties and analyze incorrect responses.	Poor syntactic and semantic competence and inaccurate knowledge of the cohesion rules caused student cohesion anomalies.
3	Al-Zubeiry(2020)	To evaluate text coherence of students majoring in English at a Saudi University, KSA.	The study identified particular coherence challenges students faced in this context and offered essential implications.
4	Wahby(2014)	To assess students' writing proficiency corresponding to the knowledge of implementing cohesive devices in writing process.	It was found the students' writing ability corresponded to the level of awareness of cohesive ties. In other words, greater the awareness of cohesive ties the higher their English writing proficiency.
5	Salem , Alqahtani and Kesavan(2020)	This study applied task-oriented teaching to manage the gap between cohesive ties and the use of lexical.	This study significantly improved students' grammatical competence and the use of cohesive ties. Participants showed a higher degree of motivation and engagement in group work activities.
6	Bui (2022)	To find out cohesion error patterns, and misconceptions that lead to challenges in utilizing cohesive devices.	The students struggled to identify some language items and writing requirements of good quality. Thus, writing quality was affected.
7	Saleh, Bharati and Islami(2022)	The study aimed to explore how cohesive lexical devices, their uses along with cohesive grammatical devices, the correctness of cohesive device uses, etc.	There was a significant correlation between students' writing skills and cohesive ties. Low mastery of cohesive ties affected the quality of students' writing. The study suggested that cohesive ties are crucial to



			enhance the writer's and reader's communication.
8	Huong(2022)	To study cohesive devices in English writings during taking blended or online courses.	Cohesive devices in the online English writing were partly affected by the types of topics. In other words, unfamiliar and difficult topics did not allow learners to utilize cohesive ties features to make writing impressive. As a result, they faced difficulties in writing.
9	DwiJayanti&Hidayat (2021)	This study examined 16 English reading texts from a national final examination test attempting to identify cohesive ties and explore how the use of, for instance, references and substitution might impact cohesiveness.	The percentage of grammatical cohesion devices used in the reading texts was relatively low and varied across all grammatical devices. The study concluded that although texts showed a certain degree of cohesiveness, they still needed more use in terms of grammatical cohesion devices.
10	Hameed (2022)	To identify the synonyms that are most frequently used. It also aims to research the use of synonyms as a device to improve the cohesiveness of writing.	Students have problems in selecting appropriate synonyms as they are short of vocabulary.

4.2. Reviews related to Dynamic Assessment

	Author(s), year : Details in the references	Objectives/ Questions	Findings
1	Rashidi&Bahador iNejad(2018).	To investigate the impact of dynamic assessment on the writing ability of 17 EFL Iranian learners. Teachers mediated the process on topic choice, generation of ideas, and revision.	Dynamic assessment enhanced the learners' motivation, EFL writing quality, and self-esteem. The learners gained more confidence in their EFL writing process.
2	Etemadi&Abbasi an (2023).	This experimental study examined the effect of	Although this study detected no significant difference among the



		different modalities of dynamic assessment on 120 advanced EFL Iranian learners' writing revision types.	student groups in terms of 'Permutation', there was a significant difference in the groups in favor of the facilitative dynamic assessment modality over its counterpart.
3	KhoramiFard&Derakhshi(2019)	To see if Vygotskian Socio-cultural Theory (SCT) enhance the linguistic accuracy of students' writing skill.	Application of DA (as an alternative method of testing) yields favorable outcome on the test results. Vygotskian socio-cultural theory was proved to be useful on mediation of DA for mastering cohesive ties and making writing skills better.
4	Vergara, Caraballo, Castellon, Vásquez and Becker (2019).	To see the effect of DA application on reading and writing skills.	Implementing DA in learning-teaching writing and reading is quite adequate; however, some factors need to be properly dealt with.
5	Babamoradi, Nasiri and Mohammadi(2018)	To explore the attitudes of 22 Iranian EFL learners towards teaching and testing writing via computerized dynamic assessment.	This study concluded that computerized dynamic assessment positively impacted the experiences and attitudes of the learners.
6	MovahedFar, Abbasian&Ameri (2022)	To investigate the effect of computer-based dynamic assessment (CBDA) on Iranian EFL learners' performance in writing and their attitude towards CBDA.	The study's findings suggest that teaching and assessing writing skills through a computer can improve students' performance in writing. Alongside its theoretical contributions to the field, it may assure the practitioners of the cognitive and emotive applicability and efficacy of CBDA in EFL settings in general and in teaching writing skills in particular
7	Rad (2021)	To study the effectiveness of a DA (Hybrid) on learners' writing.	The results showed that HDA and technological mediation assisted target learners through interaction between teacher and learners.
8	Kaveh&Rassaei(2022)	To examine the effectiveness of a mobile-mediated dynamic assessment modality on EFL	Both mobile-mediated and face-to-face DA were found to be useful and productive beneficial for learners'



		learners' writing ability.	writing fluency. However, interesting it was noted that mobile-mediated DA was more effective.
9	Abdulaal et al. (2022)	To ascertain the impact of dynamic and diagnostic assessment on fluency and accuracy in speaking.	DA was proved to be effective.
10	Saba GhanbariHaez MahtabDelfani (2022)	This study applied Vygotsky's (1934) socio-cultural theory to investigate the impact of dynamic assessment on EFL learners' speaking fluency.	The results showed an improvement in the students' speaking skills and subskills.

4.3. Reviews related to mediation strategy

	Author(s), year : Details in the references	Objectives/ Questions	Findings
1	Andujar, Alberto(2020)	To study the possibility of a pedagogical dynamic assessment approach in fostering students' second language using an instant messaging smartphone application.	The study indicated a positive impact of this mobile phone-driven pedagogical approach on the learning process. Students embraced this newly introduced engaging approach and extended its use beyond the class requirements.
2	Rassaei, at al (2023)	To measure effectiveness of mobile mediated DA via WhatsApp.	Mobile-mediated DA can facilitate EFL students in learning English grammar more easily and effectively.
3	Rad. (2021).	To find out the potential of a pedagogical hybrid dynamic assessment (HDA) approach to enhance writing via mobile instant messaging application such as Edmodo	This study indicated that a hybrid approach of dynamic assessment using mobile phone messaging applications can enhance student and instructor communication.
4	Rezaei, Behjat&Bagheri (2022).	To examine the effect of mobile-mediated DA on enhancement of English learners' vocabulary.	The study concluded that teachers could improve students' vocabulary learning using an electronic-based dynamic assessment, especially in light of the technology advancement the



			world is experiencing these days and our youth tendency towards use of technology.
5	Sherkuziyeva, Imamutdinovna Gabidullina, Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim <i>et al</i> (2023)	To examine the impacts of computerized DA on the writing performance and speaking skills.	C-DA helped EFL learners improve both their written and speaking skills.
6	Haez&Delfani(2022)	To see the results from online synchronous DA sessions...	The experimental group showed development.
7	Rassaei (2023)	To suggest a framework for implementing group DA via smartphones to improve EFL learners' abilities ...	Learners' responses on DA was encouraging. Students demonstrated a higher degree of responsiveness to teacher mediation via smartphones.
8	Zeng, Xu and Chen(2019)	To study if the computerized DA holds value for second language education.	DA was found useful especially in speaking and listening skills.
9	Rassaei (2021)	To implement smartphones-based group DA in improvement of learners' writing skills.	It was found that DA was significantly effective when mediated via smartphones or similar gadgets.
10	Sung, Chang, & Liu (2016)	To see the effects of integrated mobile devices on learning.	A very moderate effect of mobile application was noticed on education. Hence, it must be noted that there might be some factors which affected the process.

5. Analysis, Results and Conclusion

5.1. Analysis

An in-depth review of the findings of the studies considered shows following results corresponding to research questions:

5.2. Results

RQ.1-What are the difficulties in learning cohesive ties, and why?

Most studies reveal that EFL learners in general face difficulties in learning cohesive ties which ultimately leads to specific issues in the task of writing. In fact, cohesive ties in English are quite many, and it is difficult to differentiate their usages and use correctly. In the case of EFL Saudi students, the difference in mother tongue (Arabic) and target language (English) significantly impacts student learning of such features.

**RQ.2-What is the role of DA in teaching cohesive ties in English?**

DA helps in testing the areas of difficulties and facilitating teachers to teach and learners to grasp the language elements quickly.

RQ.3-What kinds of technology mediated feedback are more effective in learning cohesive ties for writing?

Technology plays crucial roles in the process of interaction between the instructor and the students. Apps like WhatsApp can be extremely useful in sending immediate feedback to enhance learning the cohesive ties.

5.3. Conclusions

This study revealed that proper use of dynamic assessment to teach cohesive ties can enhance the learning process. Based on the findings of many studies, it is found that proper usage of dynamic assessment facilitates students participate in the process of learning EFL. DA involves students in the learning environment to a great extent due to DA and technology mediation for learning cohesive ties. Dynamic assessment is a genuine test of the students' needs and potential. It is a good idea to take dynamic assessment into consideration in learning cohesive ties because students gets more involved with the process. Instant technological support via mediation adds to creating a conducive learning environment in digital era. Technology occupies a massive space in our youth's lives and forms their future. Research documents that reaching out to EFL learners via technology and integrating teacher-mediated dynamic assessment allows our students to grow at many levels. EFL instructors must update and equip their teaching approaches with the fast-growing technology students have embraced in their daily routines.

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