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The Implementation of Dynamic Assessment in EFL Learners' Writing

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Abstract

This research investigates the topic of dynamic assessment (DA) in an Indonesian setting and to a specific degree of competence to extract key facts. In the first phase of the investigation, quantitative data were collected, and analytic approaches were used. In the second phase, a qualitative approach was employed to explore learners' and teachers' impressions of DA on students' writing abilities. The participants were 100 students recruited from the State University of Malang, Indonesia. The paired and independent sample t-test results demonstrated that the DA enhances learners' writing skills on multiple levels, including content, vocabulary, language, organisation, and mechanics. It is strongly recommended that EFL writing teachers in all learning contexts use DA in academic EFL writing programs. Further research can look at some DA concerns and develop acceptable solutions.

Keywords: Dynamic Assessment (DA), EFL learners, writing development

1. Introduction

Alsamadani (2010) argued that "writing is a difficult process since it requires multiple talents, such as formulating a thesis statement, producing supporting information, reviewing, and editing" (Qader & Arslan, 2019). Further, Brown (1985) believed that learning could occur outside of instructional settings in environments that promote learner-centeredness and accomplishment of learning outcomes (Qader & Arslan, 2019). Teaching strategies in writing classrooms refer to means of talking, showing, and leading, as well as active participation so that those who do not know can learn, those who do not understand may comprehend and discern, and those who are unskilled can be skilled (Leach & Moon, 2008).

Weigle (2007) recommends that second language writing teachers learn how to construct, administer, and score writing projects to improve their writing assessment skills. She claims that stakeholders must be thoroughly aware of how language tests are used and abused. She goes on to say that teachers must be able to recognise better evaluation and comprehend its applications in the school setting, as well as realise both formative and summative assessments, identify the aspects of great writing, respect the meaningful context idea of a good text, and develop language skills using information from external sources for required assessments (Crusan et al., 2016).

According to research on second and foreign language teachers' attitudes, teachers are viewed as "active, thinking decision makers" based on practical concepts of classroom instruction. Nonetheless, teachers' practices do not necessarily match their beliefs, with the amount to which teachers can act in accordance with their convictions determined in part by their contextual experience as educators (Wang et al., 2020). Teachers tend to place a greater emphasis on the steps of the writing process, with less emphasis on grammar and mechanics in the revision/editing stage, as well as less explicit writing instruction. Teachers advocating for a more constructivist approach (e.g., 'inquiry-based') are more likely to devote more time in writing, emphasise rhetorical style and voice development, and incorporate students' choices and process approach in learning writing (Wang & Matsumura, 2019).

Parr & Timperley (2010) defined assessment for learning as a pedagogical setting that encourages students to study and participate in their studies. Learning assessments are intended to offer information about student performance that may be utilised to promote learning and improve teaching. The quality of teaching and learning outcomes can be improved using assessment data. While early discussions of formative assessment centred on instructors' roles in acquiring data and using it to inform their instruction, there has been a recent shift in perspective. Formative evaluation has been reframed as a social, collaborative activity more closely linked to learning. The focus has

changed to the instructor and students working together to improve student learning. Teachers must assist their writers in understanding their learning goals and create opportunities for them to receive feedback on their progress toward those goals to reap the benefits of assessment for learning. The students' comprehension of what constitutes good performance, for example, how they define success in a task and what they might do to attain it, are intimately related to the feedback and instruction given (Parr & Timperley, 2010).

According to Vygotsky (1980), there is a gap between what learners can achieve with structured help from others, i.e. scaffolding, and what they can achieve without it. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the distance between two points (ZPD). Theoretically, this approach nicely suits the notion of ZPD and scaffolding (Bai, 2015). Rubrics have been used by teachers, schools, and school systems for more accurate assessment in all disciplines. Recently, however, some educators have questioned the widespread belief that using rubrics improves inter-rater reliability and validity, as well as overall assessment accuracy and quality. Educators increasingly realise that no rubric can adequately evaluate pupils' writing quirks or their unique knowledge of ideas. Rubrics have even been said to constrain and entrench people's perceptions of what constitutes effective writing (Reza & Lovorn, 2010).

The shortcomings of traditional testing methods prompted researchers to develop more comprehensive systems evaluating more features of learners. Their efforts resulted in assessment as a method of comprehensive testing. However, assessment in and of itself, due to its emphasis and reliance on learners' final products, has significant flaws thought to be solved in a new kind of assessment, known as Dynamic Assessment (Aghaebrahimian et al., 2014).

It is difficult for an outsider witnessing a DA session to tell if they are watching an assessment or an instructive lesson because both happen simultaneously during the dynamic assessment. Poehner & Lantolf (2005) argued that every DA sessions both an educational and an evaluation tool. DA is discovered based on Vygotsky's concept that skills are spontaneous and dynamic rather than innate, meaning that skills should not be viewed as unchanging attributes assessed (Lidz & Gin, 2003). Instead, it is a product of group involvement and participation in different language acts and communication (Shabani, 2018). In contrast to Traditional Assessment (TA) that focuses on summative assessment of students as a measure of program performance and quality, DA tries to combine instructional strategies to examine the mechanisms of students to identify their ongoing and potential development. In another way, DA focuses on what a student can learn in the future, whereas TA focuses on what a student knows and can do right now (Aghaebrahimian et al., 2014).

Moreover, the writing assignments in DA are untimed. They must focus on cognitive and metacognitive processes, with the facilitator employing techniques in order of precedence, resulting in the cultural aspects of writing. Rather than an abstract idea, the ability to write dynamically is characterised as a historical, cultural, cognitive, and language act (Hidri, 2019). This research aims to explore the concept of DA in an Indonesian context and at a certain grade and skill level in extracting basic points and implications for syllabus planners, curriculum developers, and ultimately, Indonesian EFL students (Aghaebrahimian et al., 2014).

Theoretically, Vygotsky's scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) principles are the foundations of DA. Based on the scaffolding concept, facilitation is described as transforming other controlled activities into self-regulating activities (Birjandi & Ebadib, 2012). This occurs as a result of scaffolding, described as the data transmission stage from more proficient peers or teachers on the borders of the Zone of Proximal Development to less proficient peers or teachers. Learners' existing skills are differentiated from those learned with the help of more experienced peers or teachers in this category (Aghaebrahimian et al., 2014). From another perspective, DA is defined as the engagement between the evaluator as an impartial mediator and the learner as an interactive participant to determine the learner's modifiability and the methods for inducing and maintaining beneficial improvements in cognitive functioning (Lidz, 1987). In addition, DA is fundamentally dissimilar from TA in this regard (Aghaebrahimian et al., 2014).

DA has the advantage of using a dualistic approach to evaluation and classroom practice, in which students present rate of understanding is transformed into a context-bound prospective degree of development (Hidri, 2019). To keep up with changing learning theories, evaluation has evolved from the assessment of learning to assessment for learning, necessitating seeking professional advice to shift away from the assessment for accrediting and responsibility reasons and toward a framework where students may engage in self and peer assessment, acquire deep understanding through formative assessment, and close the gap between the actual and expected performance (zone of proximal development) (Vygotsky, 1980). Modern inventions, such as collaborative learning and writing portfolios reviewed by peers, teachers, and instructional professionals, are promising for integrating writing into contextual learning activities in and outside the classroom (Mohamadi, 2018).

It is complicated to determine the limits of ZPD due to the individual's dynamic characteristics. ZPD causes intra-group and interpersonal heterogeneity (Poehner, 2009). The instructor should rather strive to create conducive conditions in forming ZPD group by assessing learners' work to identify common difficulties while remaining conscious of individual responsiveness during group interactions. According to Shabani (2018) the limitation of research on DA is related to limited research available on group learning and a group theory that can explain group reproductive dynamics. He claims that the gap in exploratory psychological research, resulting in high levels of language pedagogy and even collaborative learning, is due to incompetence in evaluating the organisation as a psychological entity that consists of individuals from different expertise who cooperatively carry out collective tasks that cannot be completed independently.

A study by Shrestha (2017) is also relevant to the current research. He looked into the possibility of using DA to assist the transfer of genre-based characteristics and conceptual comprehension of academic literacy course to business studies. Over the course of Over the course of two DA tasks, he used email, instant chat, and wiki comments to implement interactionist DA. He used DA-based mediation to help the learner master the task and reconfigured it as needed. He kept track of tutor and student movements, as well as proof of the

participants' writing improving. He looked at how genre traits and conceptual understanding were transferred from the second DA to a more difficult job, called TA, after the second DA (transfer assignment). Finally, all three students successfully wrote macro-theme, as taught and exemplified in DA literature. The findings of Shrestha (2017) showed the students successfully transferred their capacity to create relevant themes into a new and more difficult evaluation context. As a result, the DA procedures have helped them develop genre awareness (Afshari et al., n.d.) question.

2. Method

2.1 Study Design

Quantitative data collection and analysis methodologies were used in the study's initial phase. Qualitative method was employed in the second round to investigate learners' and teachers' perceptions of DA on students' writing abilities. Hence, this study used mixed-method in both major experimental and minor qualitative phases.

2.2 Participants

The participants of this study were 100 students recruited from the State University of Malang, Indonesia, majoring in translation. They had relatively low English proficiency and they aged between 18 to 21 years. These students were then assigned into experimental and control group consisting of 50 participants each.

2.3 Instruments

The following tests and instruments were used in this study.

- a) The TOEFL Writing Scoring Guide (2007) developed by ETS was used to score the writing scripts in the pre-test/post-test
- b) Two IELTS (International English Language Testing System) writing tests were adapted from the Cambridge English IELTS 10 (2015) and were used in the pre and post-tests.

2.4 Procedures

The researchers randomly grouped the samples. Next, the students took a non-dynamic pre-writing test. They were asked to write texts about "Many individuals believe that grades are ineffective in motivating them to learn. Do you agree or disagree with this point of view? To support your answer, provide rationale and examples". The DA process was then conducted in the experimental group during 12 weeks of instruction session. The interactions were audio recorded to be later used in qualitative data analysis. A standard instruction with no interaction and dialogic bargaining was given to the control class. In the experimental class, the entire enrichment program (i.e. the treatment interval) was dynamic because participants were engaged in the three stages of the writing process: topic selection, idea development, and revision. The teacher discussed a favourite topic with the students ahead of time at the topic selection step. The teacher opened a discussion on the selected chosen topic and occasionally offered certain ideas about the topic and related concerns to stimulate students' creativity.

DA group interactions intensified in the revising stage, where learners receive a wide range of questions, tips, descriptions, responses while being engaged in the revising phase. The Zone of Actual Development (ZAD) and individual functioning were explored when the teacher (facilitator) asked the students to revise their statements at the beginning of the interactions. When the teacher realised they could not finish the revision assignment independently, the teacher started giving them prompts and stimulating questions. The teacher was meticulous in grading the interventions and ensure that minimum support was provided. The support usually was given implicitly until the expected outcomes were achieved. Contingency was the teacher's second premise, which he used in conjunction with graduation. When the teacher detected symptoms of agency and autonomous functioning, the teacher tended to remove the scaffolding. Finally, the teacher communicated with the learners in dialogic cooperation to determine their suitable levels and personalise his assistance to their needs. The teacher believed that identifying the learners' ZPD would be nearly impossible without it.

The DA technique was implemented in the following manner: Firstly, the teacher and students agreed upon a theme for which the students were to write an essay to be submitted in the following session. Secondly, during the subsequent session, one of the twenty-two essays submitted by the students was chosen. Thirdly, the students were tasked with analyzing the essay's sentence quality and making any necessary adjustments to the selected essay, which was written on the board. Fourthly, the group interaction commenced with the teacher selecting a sentence and instructing the students to identify and correct any faults. Fifthly, the mediator provided implicit to explicit mediation cues, as suggested by Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994), until the appropriate forms were elicited, in cases where students failed to identify or rectify any existing errors. Sixthly, when the teacher's mediation and group scaffolding were unsuccessful in improving the sentence, the corrected form was presented with a discussion to clarify any linguistic aspects. Lastly, the group interaction continued in the same way with subsequent sentences.

After the treatment, a composition writing post-test was administered to assess whether the DA interactions had any impact on students' writing performance. The students were given a prompt on a different topic, which asked them to write about what they would change in their country if given the opportunity, and to support their answer with specific reasoning and examples. Two experienced colleagues, who had over ten years of experience teaching and analyzing essays, independently scored both compositions to ensure inter-rater reliability. The findings of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented in the subsequent sections.

2.5 Data Analysis

2.5.1 Qualitative Analysis

(Poehner, 2011) employed a microgenetic framework in a qualitative study to examine the G-DA procedures and uncover learners' writing changes. The analysis was conducted on three levels, namely task completion, the amount and quality of mediation provided to the learners to comprehend the text, and learners' reciprocity patterns to comprehend their responsiveness to mediation and obtain evidence for micro validity interpretations. Two types of quantitative data were collected and analyzed. The first type involved GDA (n= 20) and comparison group (n= 20) scores on the writing pre-test and post-test. The mean of these scores was used to evaluate the efficacy of G-DA in enhancing EFL writing development and compare it to that of conventional, explicit techniques.

The pre- and post-test data were also used to examine the performance of the G-DA class's three subgroups (low, mid, and high ability learners) and how they differed on the tests. The second type of quantitative data involved frequency counts of mediation occurrences for each writing component, based on Jacobs & Jackson's (1981) model. These frequencies were counted and recorded for each GDA session during the experimental course to determine which writing component in the G-DA class was mediated most frequently, as well as how the number of mediations per session evolved over time.

2.5.2 Quantitative Analysis

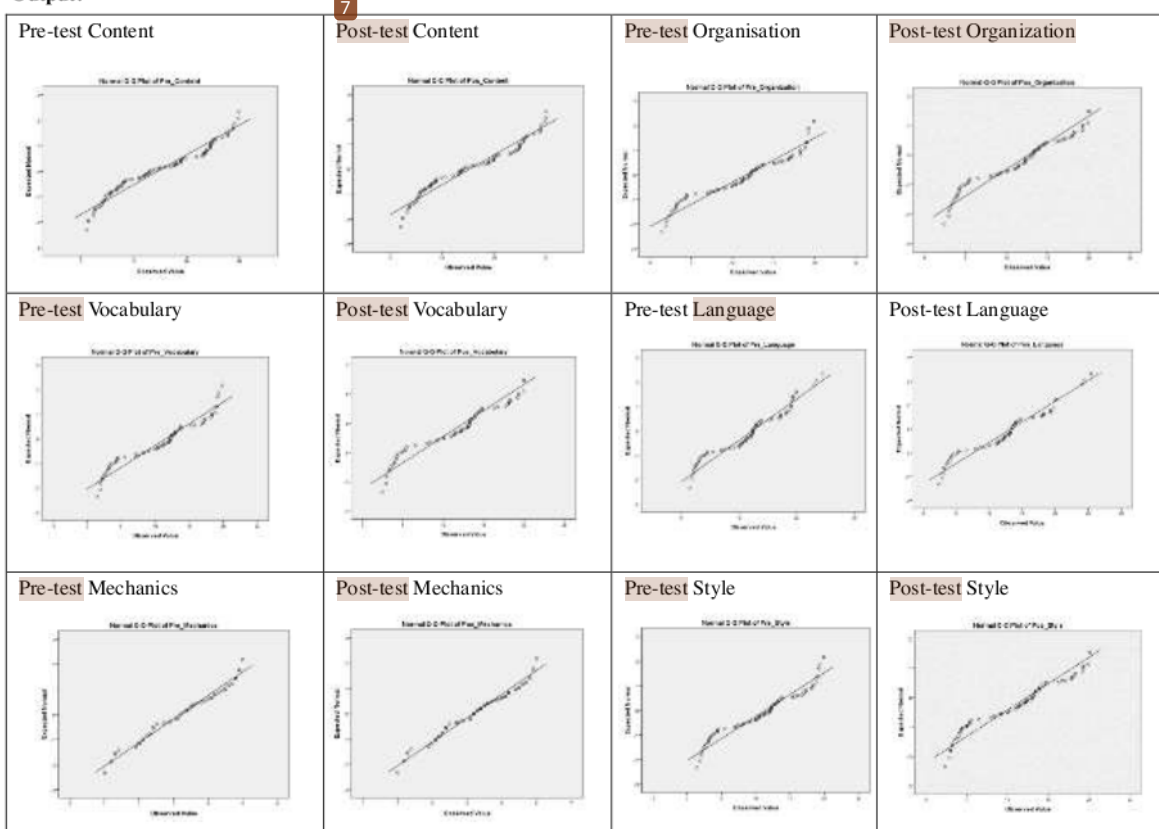
Qualitative data were students' responses toward the open-ended questionnaires regarding the efficacy of DA as well as field notes made by the classroom teacher based on direct observations of classroom activities, interactions, and learners' development throughout the course..

3. Result

3.1 Normality

The normality test was conducted to check whether the data followed a normal distribution. Tests can be done visually using a Q-Q Plot.

Output:



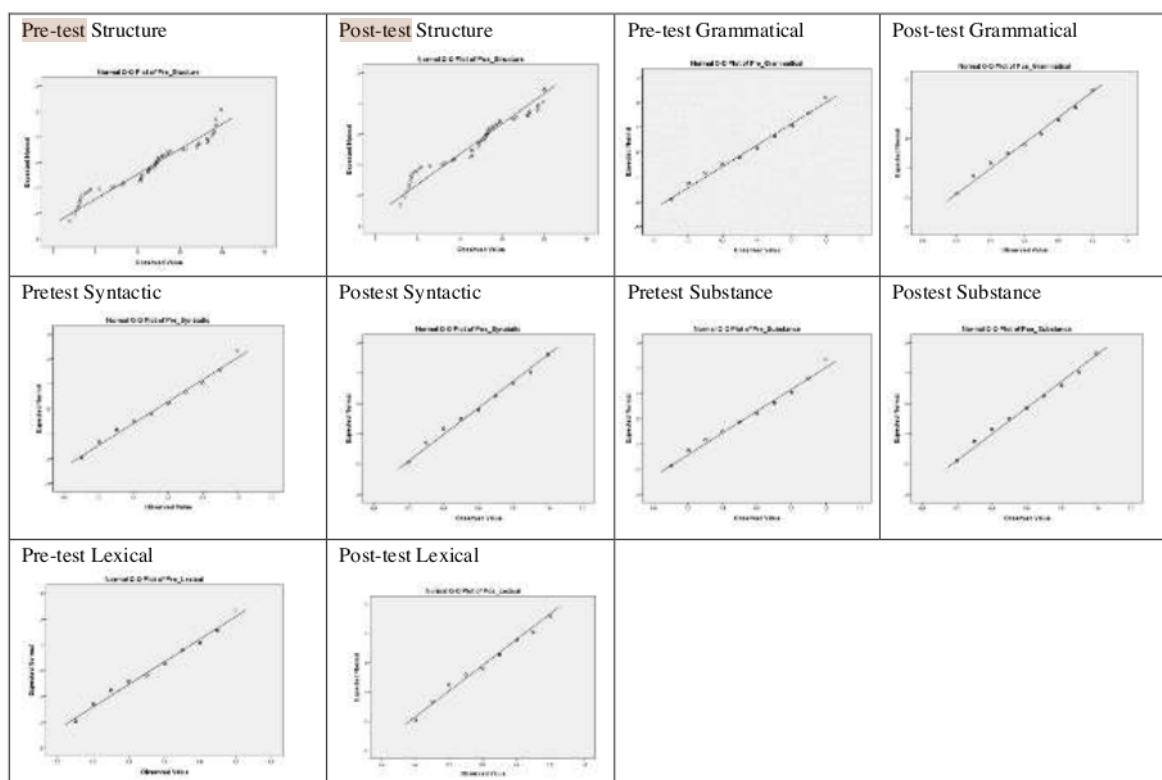


Figure 1. Normal Q-Q Plot

Interpretation:

The Q-Q plot in Figure 1 shows that all pre-test and post-test data have data plots near or around the diagonal line. In other words, all pre-test and post-test data are normally distributed.

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-Content	14,519	100	8,5193	,8519
	Post Content	15,282	100	8,3795	,8379
Pair 2	PreOrganization	11,710	100	5,5877	,5588
	PosOrganization	12,656	100	5,5677	,5568
Pair 3	PreVocabulary	11,530	100	5,6365	,5637
	PosVocabulary	12,504	100	5,6026	,5603
Pair 4	PreLanguage	12,281	100	5,8909	,5891
	PosLanguage	13,321	100	5,7367	,5737
Pair 5	PreMechanics	3,197	100	1,0650	,1065
	PosMechanics	4,188	100	1,0579	,1058
Pair 6	Prestyle	11,406	100	5,6222	,5622
	PosStyle	12,359	100	5,5834	,5583
Pair 7	PreStructure	12,374	100	5,0705	,5071
	Post Structure	13,327	100	5,0162	,5016
Pair 8	PreGrammatical	,537	100	,2338	,0234
	PosGrammatical	,635	100	,2302	,0230
Pair 9	PreSyntactic	,535	100	,2285	,0228
	PosSyntactic	,633	100	,2279	,0228
Pair 10	PreSubstance	,533	100	,2318	,0232
	PosSubstance	,632	100	,2300	,0230
Pair 11	PreLexical	,522	100	,2281	,0228
	PosLexical	,620	100	,2270	,0227

Interpretation:

The participants in this study were 100 students. Table 1 presents the paired-sample statistics of the pre-test and post-test of 11 variables. The highest mean of pre-test and post-test for the content variable is 14.519 (SD = 8.5193) and 15.282 (SD = 8.3795). In contrast, the lowest is for the lexical errors variable, with the mean of 0.522 (SD = 0.2281) and 0.620 (SD = 0.2270), respectively.

3.3 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis aims to determine the level of closeness of the relationship expressed by the correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient is between -1 and 1, with a positive or negative sign indicating the direction of the relationship. The correlation coefficient of 0 means no correlation/relationship, and the correlation coefficient closer to 1 or -1 means then the relationship or correlation is getting positively or negatively stronger. The detailed results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Paired-Sample Correlation Test

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	PreContent&PosContent	100	,991	,000
Pair 2	PreOrganization&PosOrganization	100	,999	,000
Pair 3	PreVocabulary&PosVocabulary	100	1,000	,000
Pair 4	PreLanguage&PosLanguage	100	,985	,000
Pair 5	PreMechanics&PosMechanics	100	,996	,000
Pair 6	Prestyle&PosStyle	100	,999	,000
Pair 7	PreStructure&PosStructure	100	,999	,000
Pair 8	PreGrammatical&PosGrammatical	100	,998	,000
Pair 9	PreSynatatic&PosSynatatic	100	,998	,000
Pair 10	PreSubstance&PosSubstance	100	,999	,000
Pair 11	PreLexical&PosLexical	100	,998	,000

Interpretation:

The correlation analysis indicates a significant relationship between pre-test and post-test on the vocabulary variable. In addition, the correlation coefficient for the vocabulary variable is 1. So, it can be concluded that there is a perfect positive relationship between the pre-test and post-test on the vocabulary variable. This means that the higher the pre-test score on vocabulary, the higher the post-test score will be.

Furthermore, the variables of content, organisation, language, mechanics, style & quality of expression, structure, grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors indicate a significant relationship between the pre-test and the post-test. The correlation coefficients of the content, organisation, language, mechanics, style & quality of expression, structure, grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors are close to 1. So, it can be concluded that there is a very strong positive relationship between the pre-test and post-test on the variables. The higher the pre-test score, the higher the post-test score.

3.4 Paired T-Test Analysis

The t-test is used as a comparative test to examine the difference in the mean of two pairs of data groups. The paired data mean that samples were from the same subject but experiencing two different treatments, such as before and after treatment.

Table 3. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PreContent – Post Content	-,7630	1,1231	,1123	-,9858	-,5402	-6,794	99	,000
Pair 2	Pre_Organization Pos_Organization	-,9460	,2564	,0256	-,9969	-,8951	-36,895	99	,000
Pair 3	Pre_Vocabulary Pos_Vocabulary	-,9740	,1323	,0132	-1,0002	-,9478	-73,630	99	,000
Pair 4	Pre_Language - Pos_Language	-1,0400	1,0273	,1027	-1,2438	-,8362	-10,124	99	,000
Pair 5	Pre_Mechanics Pos_Mechanics	-,9910	,0922	,0092	-1,0093	-,9727	-107,464	99	,000
Pair 6	Pre_style - Pos_Style	-,9530	,1904	,0190	-,9908	-,9152	-50,052	99	,000
Pair 7	Pre_Structure - Pos_Structure	-,9530	,1888	,0189	-,9905	-,9155	-50,475	99	,000
Pair 8	Pre_Grammatical Pos_Grammatical	-,0980	,0141	,0014	-,1008	-,0952	-69,649	99	,000
Pair 9	Pre_Synatatic - Pos_Synatatic	-,0980	,0141	,0014	-,1008	-,0952	-69,649	99	,000
Pair 10	Pre_Substance Pos_Substance	-,0990	,0100	,0010	-,1010	-,0970	-99,000	99	,000
Pair 11	Pre_Lexical - Pos_Lexical	-,0980	,0141	,0014	-,1008	-,0952	-69,649	99	,000

Interpretation:

Table 3 indicate a significant average difference between the pre-test and post-test scores on the content, organisation, vocabulary, language, mechanics, style & quality of expression, structure, grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors variables. Thus, the treatment given is very good.

4. Discussion

A mixed method was used in this study to examine both quantitative and qualitative effects of DA teaching on EFL students' writing skills. The quantitative analysis demonstrated that the experimental class outperformed the control class. The paired samples and independent sample t-tests revealed that the DA improves the writing skills of the students on different levels, including content, vocabulary, language, organisation, and mechanics. The DA interactions shown in the procedures in the qualitative section demonstrate the modest appearance of patterns development of writing in EFL students over a brief period in a school setting. Across the encounters, the teacher's ability to adhere to DA characteristics, such as awareness, dependency, and interactive entertainment partnership, stood out.

From a pedagogical perspective, the DA relationships develop the foundation for forming a region of inter-subjectivity (Mateus & Quiroz-Velasco, 2017) in the public group of the classroom, where relationships transferred between main participants supplied as construction workers to propel intermediate social intelligence to greater degrees of capability. The student groups pooled their resources to create a group of exercises by establishing a brief common aim, generating a framework, and assisting one another in the revision assignments. Interaction between more and less informed learners promoted collaborative structuring (Gillies, 2003) and genuine external engagement (McCafferty S. G. et al., 2006) among the learners, resulting in reciprocal benefit for beginner and more skilled students.

The intercessions provided served as a consciousness-raising practice, highlighting certain previously obscure writing elements. The emphasising method assisted in noticing writing characteristics, such as sentence construction, punctuation, tense, mechanics, etc as included in learners' ZPD but could not be accessed without an assistance. DA provides more accurate diagnosis of students' origins of writing issues, whether syntactic, lexical or otherwise.

Another noteworthy fact that bears emphasis is that if the modification assignment was introduced. The DA supports are effective framework method for attracting students' awareness of the assignment, simplifying the review process, reducing flexibility in the project to make it more manageable, maintaining goal orientation, identifying significant points, managing confusion, and modelling alternatives (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000).

The findings also revealed that DA had been most commonly utilised to moderate construction, language, and organisation issues and less general for content and mechanics. Learners already had a strong grasp of the material and mechanics, but their comprehension of other aspects was low.

5. Conclusion

DA is suggested to be implemented in academic EFL writing. Educators, on the other hand, must have a significant theoretical understanding and practice of DA, as well as an awareness of the mechanisms of efficient facilitation. To begin with, they should constantly analyse learners' requirements and personalise their support to their ZPD. The procedure of discovering learners' potential levels of development must then be conducted in an interactional manner. It is nearly impossible to evaluate learners' ZPD without interaction. Instruction that does not match these two conditions may be unhelpful and stifling rather than promoting development and performance.

Additional studies can explore some DA issues and find acceptable answers. Furthermore, it can be investigated in large samples of participants. Thus, to make the findings generalisable to the population of EFL learners, future researchers need to include both male and female participants at larger sample size. Future researchers can also examine the potential of DA in fostering EFL writing in different ranges of age or levels. Finally, given the role of feelings in any teaching-learning practice, future research may look into learners' emotions for DA.

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Regarding the research, authorship, and publication of this work, the researchers disclosed no potential conflict of interest.

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