Writing Woes of ESL Learners: Can Dynamic Assessment Be the Solution?

Aakash Kumar[1], William H. Rupley[1], David Paige[2], Debra McKeown[1]

[1]Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture, Texas A&M University, USA

[2]Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Northern Illinois University, USA

Correspondence: Aakash Kumar, Dept. of Teaching, Learning, and Culture, MS 4232, School of Education, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, USA.

Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of dynamic assessment (DA) in addressing grammatical writing difficulties in Pakistani English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' writing. Adopting an interactionist approach to DA, the research observes mediational moves by a teacher during the writing assessment process. The study employs a qualitative case study design, examining the interactional patterns and outcomes of DA for three higher secondary-level Pakistani ESL learners over an eight-week period. The findings indicate that the interactionist approach to DA is a promising method for improving the grammatical accuracy of Pakistani ESL learners, particularly in areas such as tenses, pronouns, and subject-verb agreement. The results of this study have significant implications for writing instruction in ESL contexts. Dynamic assessment can support the development of writing skills by providing ESL writers with opportunities to engage in distributive practice and receive feedback on their writing, resulting in a tailored and effective approach to writing instruction.

Keywords: writing skills, dynamic assessment, interactionist approach, ESL, writing development

1. Introduction

Writing proficiency is an intricate language skill that encompasses a multitude of sub-skills, demanding students to be competent in grammar, sentence structure, and idea generation (Qin & Uccelli, 2020). Lack of competency in these subskills can impede students' ability to effectively convey their ideas and thoughts in writing (Crossley, 2020). The traditional approach for teaching writing in Pakistani schools focuses on the final written product rather than the process of writing (Fareed et al. 2021). This approach often overlooks the importance of developing students' fundamental writing skills such as grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. According to Haider (2012) pronouns, subject-verb agreement, tenses, articles, and prepositions are the most common areas where students struggle the most. Zafar (2016) also found that the most common errors made by students in writing tasks were related to tenses, modal verbs, conditionals, and subject-verb agreement. Due to the frequent occurrence of such errors, both the quality and communication suffer due to inefficiencies in the writing process. Moreover, many ESL teachers in Pakistan lack the necessary training and expertise in teaching writing skills, particularly those related to the technical aspects of writing. A majority of the teachers teaching writing have a background in literature and lack knowledge of linguistic principles and methodologies that can help learners improve their writing skills (García, & Isabel, 2018).

Regrettably, Pakistan's prevalent teaching methods and assessment practices often lack the necessary scaffolding required to support students, resulting in subpar writing skills (Sarwat et al., 2021). One major impediment is their overreliance on static assessment methodologies that merely grade students on predetermined criteria without imparting feedback for improvement (Javed et al., 2013). As Teo (2012) noted, static assessment scores what the student does, however; it fails to score what the student does not do but could if feedback were provided. This inadequacy of constructive feedback is a substantial obstacle to the development of writing skills, as it hampers students' ability to recognize and rectify their errors (Fernandez & Siddiqui, 2017). The absence of effective feedback also limits teachers in identifying and providing targeted instruction and support (Graham, 2019). Therefore, a more effective approach to teaching and assessing writing skills is needed in ESL contexts in Pakistan. As an alternative, dynamic assessment (DA) presents a more effective approach to addressing these concerns, as it integrates teacher mediation and feedback during the assessment process by offering

individualized instruction and guidance tailored to each learner's specific requirements (Kumar et al., 2023; Poehner & Wang, 2021). With a DA approach, teachers can assist students in overcoming grammatical difficulties and improving their writing skills in an interactive and supportive learning environment (Lantolf et al., 2015). Given the poor writing outcomes in Pakistani students, there exists a critical need for a shift towards dynamic assessment in ESL contexts, fostering the development of effective writing skills (Poehner & Yu, 2022).

Dynamic Assessment

Dynamic assessment, informed by Vygotskian sociocultural theory, represents a significant departure from traditional static assessment practices in language education (Vygotsky, 1978). Static assessments have a product focus, whereas DA is aimed at interactional processes and subsequent learning that occurs (Kushki et al., 2022; Hidri, 2019; Zhang & Xi, 2023). In the DA approach, students are mediated by the teacher's instruction and receive guidance, feedback, and support that are tailored to student individual capabilities (Smith, 2018). This approach enables students to bridge the gap between their actual knowledge and their potential knowledge, as well as to gradually become self-regulated learners.

Vygotsky (1978) argues students' existing performance in assessment reveals the previously developed abilities, learning unrevealed those abilities which are to be mastered. Contrariwise to traditional static assessment, DA assumes: a) students' mental processes are modifiable, b) learning is embedded within the assessment, c) the main objective of the assessment is to help students identify their latent strengths (Lidz & Gindis, 2003). DA informs not only about what students can achieve independently but also about what they can achieve with appropriate scaffolding, therefore, DA uses diagnostic and prognostic functions together which alter the examiner-examinee relationship from an impartial evaluator to a teaching-facilitator (Lidz & Gindis, 2003).

Scaffolding

Central to the DA process is scaffolding, which aims to facilitate students' development by creating conditions where students can build on prior knowledge and internalize new information (Smagorinsky, 2018). As learners work their way with the help of the teacher, the students' actual knowledge is built upon and expanded, leading to potentially greater knowledge (Taber, 2018). In contrast to traditional static assessment methods where the teacher evaluates students' performance in isolation, the teacher, in DA, provides dialogic scaffolding to students based on their Zone of Proximal Development (A distance between what a learner can accomplish with and without help from a more knowledgeable other (Smagorinsky, 2018).

The amount of scaffolding (implicit or explicit) and its frequency is gradually decreased over time as students start gaining control over their language (Rassaei, 2019), revealing the fact that the students are moving from other-dependency to self-regulation (Poehner, 2018). This progressive shift towards independence is a key to effective language learning, and DA facilitates this process by merging instruction and assessment in a unified activity.

DA vs. Static Assessment

Static Assessment provides a snapshot of a student's current abilities. It is unable to account for the potential growth a student can achieve with targeted instruction and support. However, DA presents a comprehensive view of students' learning process, including how students approach different tasks, how they respond to feedback, and how they learn skills in new contexts. DA aims to assess change in performance, learning potential, and cognitive functions which are taken as indications for future changes. However, the static assessment aims to document the current cognitive level of the students without any attempt to assess change. While developing the tasks for students, static assessment emphasizes the graduation of the difficulty level of items, psychometric properties, and representation of students' capacities. On the other hand, DA emphasizes teaching potential. Although items in DA tasks are also graduated according to difficulty level, the focus remains on the teaching of cognitive levels so that learning of one task makes students ready to perform the more advanced task.

Application of DA in ESL Writing Context

Several studies have advanced the effectiveness of DA in improving the writing skills of learners. Research focusing on its application in English as a Second Language (ESL) writing is still evolving (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018); however, some studies have explored its efficacy in writing instruction. For example, Khoshsima and colleagues (2016) examined the effect of interactionist DA on the writing ability of ESL learners. They found that learners who were exposed to the interactionist approach of DA outperformed the control group in better understanding and addressing their writing problems. Similarly, Besharati (2018) exploring the efficacy of dynamic assessment in promoting self-regulation and the development of Iranian students' essay-writing skills found a decrease in the number of DA explicit prompts over time indicating growth in autonomy and self-regulation. A study (Derakhshi, 2019) on the effect of DA in ESL learners' writing accuracy found that the experimental group significantly out-performed the control group. Although these studies advance the credibility of DA in improving ESL's writing skills, a majority relied on quantitative methods to explore the

phenomenon; thereby overlooking the rich, context-specific insights that can be gleaned from a qualitative approach. Therefore, there is a need to conduct rigorous qualitative studies, to further investigate the mediating role of DA in improving ESL learners' linguistic accuracy (Xian, 2020).

It is worth noting that no comprehensive study has been conducted with Pakistan ESL learners to investigate the potential of DA to improve their writing deficits. Given the lack of research on the use of DA to improve the writing skills of Pakistan ESL learners, it is crucial to explore the potential of this approach in the Pakistani context. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a qualitative study to investigate the effectiveness of DA in improving the essay-writing skills of ESL learners in Pakistan. The results of this study will contribute to the existing body of literature on the effectiveness of DA in ESL writing assessment and help to inform language teachers and educators about the potential of this approach to enhance ESL learners' writing capabilities in Pakistan.

2. Materials and Methods

The purpose of this study is to provide insights into the impact of mediation through interactionist DA on the development of writing skills among Pakistani ESL learners. Specifically, the study aims to gain a nuanced understanding of the impact of interactionist DA on the reduction of Pakistani ESL learners' composition errors.

The study used a qualitative case-study design, which allowed for an in-depth examination of DA on three ESL participants' writing development. The research question that guides this study is does mediation through interactionist DA contribute to minimizing Pakistani ESL learners' writing errors?

Participants

The participants of the present study were three higher secondary-level students, two male and one female, who were struggling with their essay writing skills. The selection of these participants was made intentionally by the researchers due to their evident difficulties in writing. In order to ensure their language proficiency, the researchers administered the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), which is designed to assess students' general English language abilities (King & Bigelow, 2018). The OPT results indicated one student was at the elementary level, scoring 26 out of 60, while two students were at the pre-higher secondary level, scoring 31 and 33 out of 60 respectively.

Measures

Two different instruments were used to collect data in the current study. First, eight lesson plans were utilized, followed by essay writing worksheets. The lesson plans were developed by the researchers, and reviewed by two language experts to ensure validity. Common issues (Haider, 2012) that students face when writing were identified and used when evaluating the students' essays. These issues included vocabulary, subject-verb agreement, tenses, modal verbs, articles, active-passive voice, conditionals, and coherence and cohesion.

3. Method

Two, 40-minute instructional sessions were conducted weekly with each student. During the first session one of the aforementioned common issues topics was presented, while in the second session, students were asked to write an essay incorporating the covered topics. The essay topics were predetermined and included, (1) favorite places, (2) transition from childhood to adulthood, (3) ways to reduce religious extremism in Pakistan, (4) dangers of limited knowledge, (5) impact of toy guns, and (6) difficulty in pleasing everyone.

Procedures/Methodology

The data collection was conducted over an eight-week period. Each week was dedicated to the learning and application of an identified common issue (vocabulary, subject-verb agreement, tenses, modal verbs, articles, active-passive voice, conditionals, coherence and cohesion). Students were required to produce an essay incorporating the knowledge gained each issue following a 40-minute instructional session. For example, week one was initiated with a session on subject-verb agreement on Monday, followed by the students composing an essay on the same topic on Tuesday. The remaining three days of the week were dedicated to an extensive mediation process, affording the students an opportunity to interact with their teacher and engage in writing activities that were tailored to their specific needs related to the issue.

To mediate the students' writing abilities, the researchers adopted the mediation typology lens, as presented by Poehner and Lantolf's (2005) and subsequently modified to suit the objectives of this research. Mediation typology is characterized as an inventory of 15 mediational moves between the teacher and learners, developed in tandem with the Regulatory Scale-Implicit to Explicit (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Notably, Poehner (2011) evaluated the impact of dynamic assessment (DA) on oral proficiency among L2 French learners, while the current study examined its effect on the writing proficiency of ESL learners. Therefore, the mediation typology lens was not applied directly but rather through a subset of seven out of 15 mediational moves, specifically those related to writing skills. These seven moves were further classified into two categories, implicit and explicit mediational moves, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Seven Implicit and Explicit Mediational Moves

Implicit Mediational moves	
Requesting Revision	The first and most implicit move, whereby the learner is to revise or reread their draft.
Requesting Verification	The second implicit move, whereby the learner is asked to verify or check a particular grammatical structure they had written.
Specifying the Location of an Error	The third and final implicit move whereby the teacher notifies the learner that an error exists by reading aloud or encircling the particular part of the essay and leaving it to the student to identify the error.
Explicit Mediational Moves	
Specifying the Error	The first explicit move whereby the learner is explicitly told what is the error. It aimed to determine whether a learner could identify the problem when it was stated explicitly.
Providing an Example Related to the Error	The second explicit move whereby learners were supplied with examples related to the error.
Providing Correct Response	The third explicit move whereby learners are provided with the correct response to the error.
Providing an Explanation	The most explicit mediational move used to mediate the learners in the DA session. It was employed when the correct answer was provided, but the learners still could not comprehend it. In this scenario, a correct answer followed by an explanation was provided.

The treatment in this study utilized a set of seven mediational moves that ranged from implicit to explicit levels. Notably, the selection of each mediational move was tailored to the individual needs of each participant, and the mediation process did not follow a strict sequence of moves. Instead, the most appropriate move was used to address the identified requirements of each student. The mediation process involved the task of asking students to write a second draft that incorporated the entire mediation process, thereby providing opportunities for students to apply and internalize the learning process.

Implicit mediational moves ranged from requesting revision, requesting verification, and specifying the location of an error, to identifying and correcting errors in students' essays. Implicit moves served as an effective means of scaffolding learning for many students. However, in cases where implicit moves were ineffective, explicit mediational moves were employed, which included specifying the error, providing examples related to the error, providing a correct response, and providing an explanation. The most explicit move, providing an explanation, was used when it was deemed necessary for students to gain a deeper understanding of the correction.

It is worth noting that the researcher in this study demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of individual learners by tailoring mediational moves to each student's requirements. Students wrote at least two to three drafts of each essay, depending on their ability to rectify errors through the mediation process.

4. Data Analysis

Researchers had two primary objectives for the data analysis: (1) to present how mediation through interactionist DA took place between the teacher and students, and (2) to track the gradual class-wise improvement made by students as a response to the mediational moves provided. To achieve these objectives, several steps were taken.

First, the category-wise frequencies of errors made by students in each class were counted to evaluate if they reduced over the eight classes. This approach allowed for the identification of specific areas of difficulty for the students and enabled the effective targeting of areas through mediation. Second, the overall number of errors was counted to track the improvement made by students over the eight-week period. This provided an overall picture of the progress made by the students in their essay writing skills. Third, the mediational moves (both implicit and explicit) used to mediate each student were tabularized. This allowed for the identification of the most effective mediation strategies and provided insight into how different students responded to different mediational moves.

This data analysis phase was crucial in providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of mediation through interactionist DA in improving ESL learners' essay writing skills. The tabularization of mediational moves provides insights into the effectiveness of specific mediation strategies.

5. Results

The study presents a detailed description of the three individual cases, supported by evidence from the data collected from eight classes of essays. Data were analyzed iteratively to understand the dynamic nature of each participant, and their comments during the interaction were noted and transcribed to support their progress. The results suggest that all three participants exhibited distinct characteristics, that through the individual descriptions of each case, allows readers to comprehend how each participant improved and how the frequency of their errors decreased throughout the eight classes.

Case 1 Rajeev- An enthusiastic and quick learner

Rajeev emerged as an active, enthusiastic, and quick learner. Despite his relative weaknesses in certain areas of composition, such as tenses, subject-verb agreement, coherence, and cohesion, he was highly motivated to improve his writing skills. His academic background included completion of matriculation at a local school, where instruction was primarily in Sindhi and Urdu. English was taught as a subject with little emphasis on explicit instruction, which may account for his relatively high number of errors (33) on the pre-test essay. Specifically, Rajeev's main area of difficulty included coherence and cohesion, as well as appropriate use of vocabulary, tenses, and modal verbs. The overall trajectory of Rajeev's category-wise errors across the eight treatment classes is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 indicates that Rajeev made a high number of errors in the pre-test essay, with coherence being the most challenging aspect, followed by vocabulary, tenses, and modal verbs. However, as the classes progressed Rajeev's performance steadily improved, as evidenced by the decreasing trend in category-wise errors.
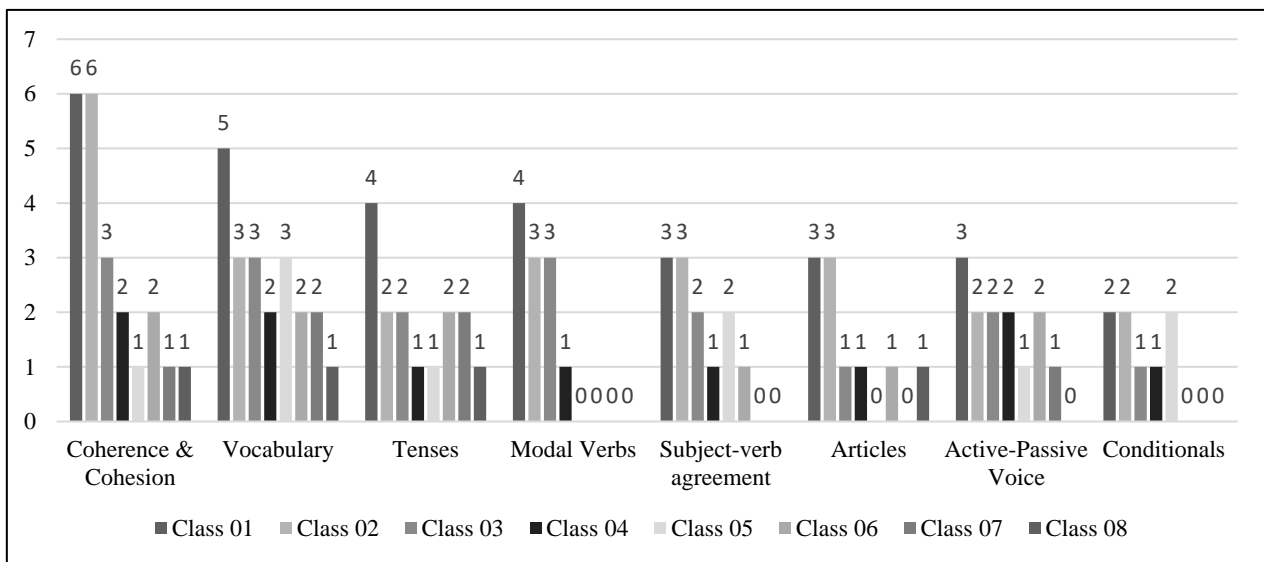

Figure 1. Rajeev's Frequency of Category-Wise Errors by Class

Rajeev initially struggled significantly with coherence and cohesion, vocabulary, tenses, modal verbs, and subject-verb agreement, with the greatest number of errors in these areas occurring in the first class. Specifically, he produced six errors in coherence, five errors in vocabulary, and four errors each in tenses, modal verbs, and subject-verb agreement. Additionally, he committed three errors related to articles and active-passive voice, as well as two errors related to conditionals. However, Rajeev demonstrated an improvement in several areas in the subsequent classes. By the second class, he exhibited progress in vocabulary, tenses, modal verbs, and active-passive voice, while showing slight improvement in other categories. Notably, in class 3, Rajeev made significant strides in coherence and cohesion, reducing the number of errors by 50% compared to the first two classes. Additionally, he demonstrated progress in subject-verb agreement, articles, and conditionals, while errors in other categories remained constant.

Subsequently, Rajeev continued to exhibit a positive trajectory of improvement. By class 8, he rectified all errors related to modal verbs, subject-verb agreement, active-passive voice, and conditionals, while only four errors persisted, with one error each related to coherence, vocabulary, tenses, and articles. Overall, these findings suggest that DA facilitated his gradual improvement in essay writing skills across multiple categories. To provide readers with a deeper understanding, Figure 2 illustrates the progression of errors in Rajeev's essays over the course of eight classes, with the vertical axis indicating the frequency of errors and the horizontal axis indicating the number of classroom sessions.

It is evident that Rajeev made 30 errors in the essays of the first class, and subsequently, the frequency of errors has

consistently declined, with only 11 errors in class 4, which remained constant for the next two classes. The frequency of errors decreased again in class 7 and culminated in just 4 errors in class 8. This progress can be attributed to the use of mediational moves by the teacher to mediate Rajeev's writing skills, as discussed in the previous section where moves ranged from implicit to explicit levels.
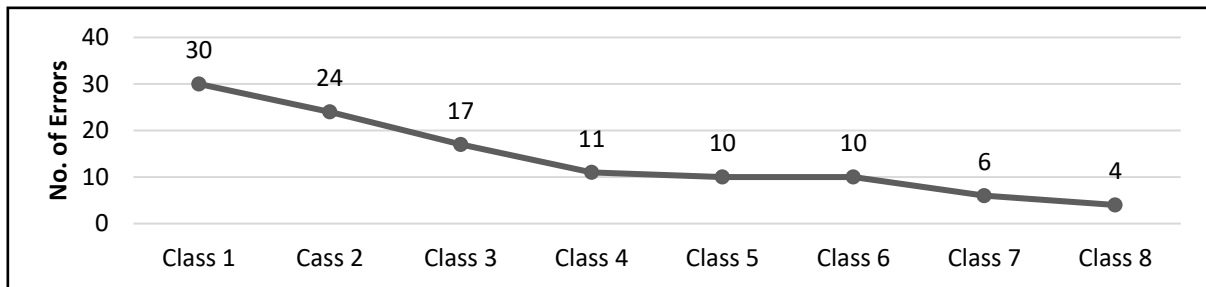

Figure 2. Rajeev's Error Frequency by Eight Classes

Table 2 presents a breakdown of the number of mediational moves, both implicit and explicit, utilized by the teacher to support Rajeev's writing skills in each class. Notably, implicit mediational moves such as revision requests, verification requests, and error location specifications were utilized more frequently than explicit moves. For instance, in class 1, a total of nine moves (seven implicit and two explicit) were used to address 30 errors in Rajeev's essays in each class.

In class 2, seven mediational moves were employed (four implicit and three explicit) to address 24 errors, while in class 3, six moves (four implicit and two explicit) were used to address 17 errors. In classes 4, 5, and 6, Rajeev made 11, 10, and 10 errors respectively, which were addressed through eight, five, and five mediational moves respectively. In the final two classes (7 and 8), Rajeev made six and four errors respectively, which were corrected through implicit moves only. Rajeev's quickly grasped concepts at the implicit level of scaffolding and did not require the most explicit scaffolding strategy, (i.e., providing explanations), throughout the eight classes. The reduction of Rajeev's errors over time suggests that he significantly benefited from the mediation and improved his writing skills.

Table 2. Rajeev's Frequency of Implicit and Explicit Mediational Moves by Class

| | | Mediational Moves | | | | | | | |
| | | Implicit | | | | Explicit | | | |
Class	Errors	Requesting revision	Requesting verification	Specifying the location of an error	Specifying the error	Providing example related to error	Providing correct response	Providing explanation	Total
1	30	✔ ✔	✔ ✔ ✔	✔ ✔	✔ ✔				9
2	24	✔ ✔	✔	✔		✔ ✔	✔		7
3	17	✔ ✔		✔ ✔	✔	✔			6
4	11	✔	✔ ✔	✔ ✔	✔ ✔	✔			8
5	10	✔	✔	✔		✔ ✔			5
6	10	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔			5
7	06	✔ ✔	✔ ✔	✔					5
8	04	✔ ✔	✔						3

Case 2 Faheem- An inquisitive Learner

Faheem's case presents a distinct contrast to Rajeev's case. Having been taught English as the medium of instruction (MOI), and a mandatory subject since childhood, Faheem's inquisitive nature and curiosity fostered a deep interest in writing skills. This enthusiasm was recognized and as a result, a generous amount of time was spent mediating his writing skills.

Figure 3 below is Faheem's category-wise trajectory of errors over the eight classes. Noted in the initial three classes, Faheem encountered difficulty with a range of categories, including articles, conditionals, vocabulary, active-passive voice, modal verbs, and subject-verb agreement. However, it was observed that coherence, cohesion and tenses posed more significant challenges for Faheem, as evidenced by a higher number of errors in these categories. Of note is Faheem's performance in class 5, where there was either a noticeable reduction or no increase in errors across all categories. Furthermore, Faheem demonstrated no errors in conditionals, vocabulary, active-passive voice, and modal verbs, indicating an improvement in his writing skills in these areas. In the final two classes, 7 and 8, Faheem showedconsiderable progress as he made fewer errors compared to his earlier classes.
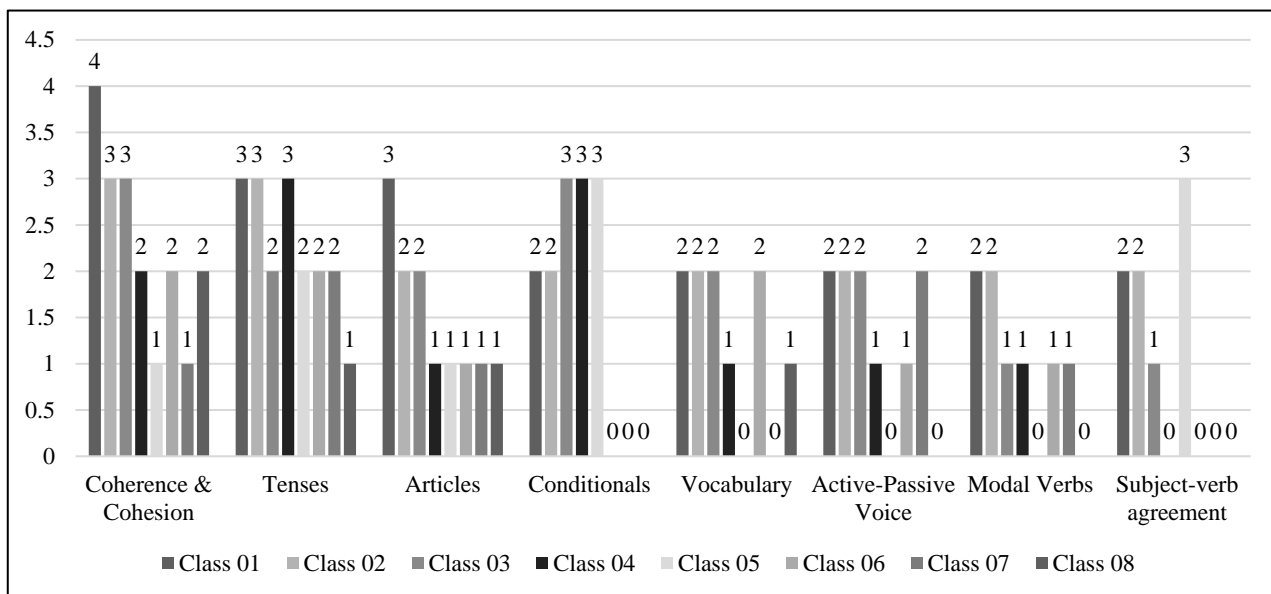

Figure 3. Faheem's Frequency of Category-Wise Errors by Class

The following figure 4 illustrates the frequency of errors in each class and their reduction over time.
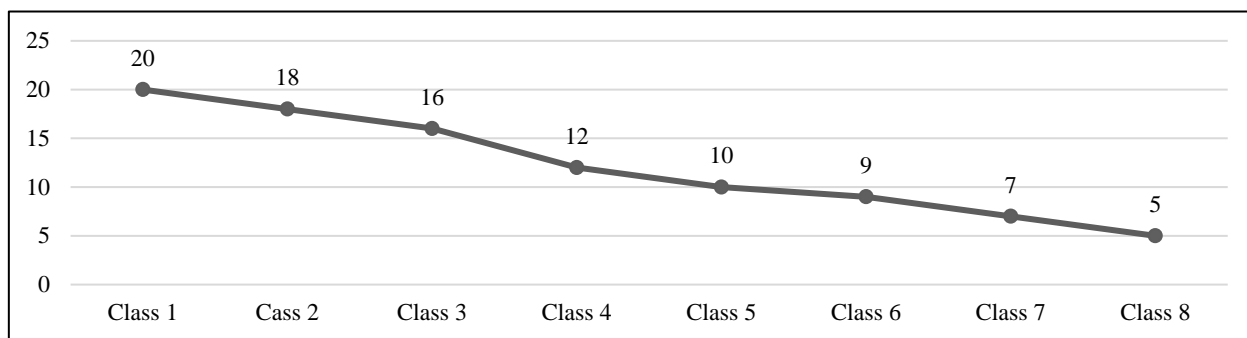

Figure 4. Faheem's Error Frequency by Class

Figure 4 details Faheem's performance in terms of the total number of errors made in his essays across the eight classes. Initially, in class 1, Faheem committed 20 errors in his essay. However, he progressively reduced the number of errors in the following two classes by 2 errors each and ended up with 16 errors. In class 4, Faheem corrected 4 out of 16 errors, thereby reducing the total number of errors to 12. This improvement trend continued over the subsequent classes, resulting in 5 errors in class eight.

Table 3 provides a comprehensive analysis of the frequency of moves used by the teacher to mediate Faheem's essays.

The table indicates that Faheem required both implicit and explicit mediational moves to rectify his errors.

Notably, Faheem was an inquisitive learner and would often ask questions until he received a satisfactory explanation, which was the most explicit form of mediation. In the first class, Faheem made 20 errors, which were corrected through 11 mediational moves, including 7 implicit and 4 explicit moves. Similarly, in class 2, Faheem's essay contained 18 errors, which were remedied through 8 moves, including 4 implicit and 4 explicit. In classes 3 to 5, Faheem made 16, 12, and 10 errors, respectively, which were corrected through 9 mediational moves in each class. In these classes, Faheem required the most explicit form of mediation, namely "providing an explanation." In the last two classes, Faheem made 9 and 7 errors, respectively, which were corrected through 7 mediational moves in each class. In class 8, all 7 mediational moves were utilized, ranging from the most implicit "requesting for revision" to the most explicit "providing an explanation," to rectify Faheem's 5 errors.

Table 3. Faheem's Frequency of Mediational Moves

		Mediational Moves							
		Implicit				Explicit			
Class	Errors	Requesting revision	Requesting verification	Specifying location of error	Specifying error	Providing example related to error	Providing correct response	Providing explanation	Total
1	20	✔✔✔	✔✔	✔✔	✔✔	✔	✔		11
2	18	✔✔	✔✔		✔	✔✔✔			8
3	16	✔✔	✔	✔	✔	✔✔	✔	✔	9
4	12	✔✔	✔	✔✔✔			✔	✔✔	9
5	10	✔✔	✔✔	✔	✔	✔✔	✔		9
6	09	✔✔	✔✔	✔		✔✔			7
7	07	✔✔	✔✔	✔	✔		✔		7
8	05	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	7

To conclude, Faheem's demonstrated a nature of asking many questions showing interest in mediation, which resulted in him receiving extra time in mediating his essays, which resulted in reduced error rate.

Case 3 Aakash- A sensitive learner

Aakash was distinguished by his responsive nature to the mediational moves. This trait stemmed from his worry about making writing mistakes, which was further fueled by his aspiration to clear the highly competitive CSS exam. Aakash had received all of his education from the same school, and his composition skills were comparatively better than his peers. As a result, he made fewer errors than Rajeev and Faheem. The category-wise trajectory of Aakash's errors is illustrated below in Figure 5.
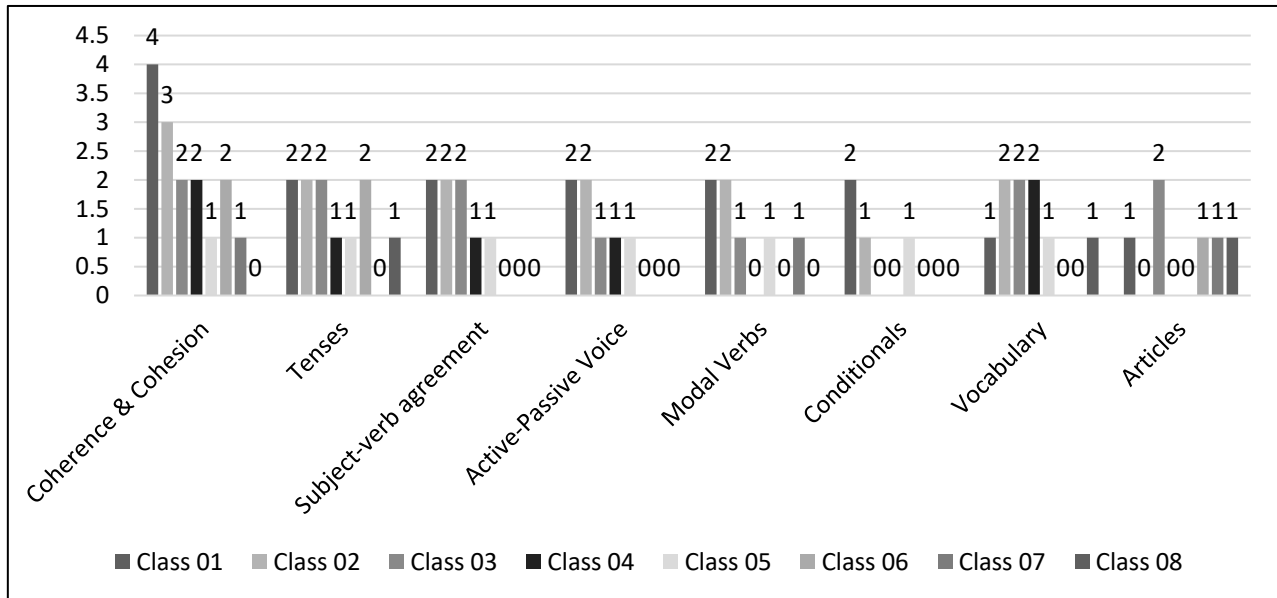
Figure 5. Aakash's Frequency of Category-Wise Errors by Class

Over the next six classes a significant improvement in Aakash's writing skills is seen, with a reduction in errors related to coherence and cohesion, subject-verb agreement, active-passive voice, modal verbs, and conditionals. By the last class, Aakash had rectified all of his errors in these categories. However, he still made a few errors in other categories, with one error each in tenses, vocabulary, and articles in class 8.

Aakash's response towards the teacher's scaffolding strategies played a crucial role in his improvement; he was able to rectify more than 80% of his errors over the eight classes. Figure 6 below displays the pattern of reduction of Aakash's errors in his essays over the course of eight classes.
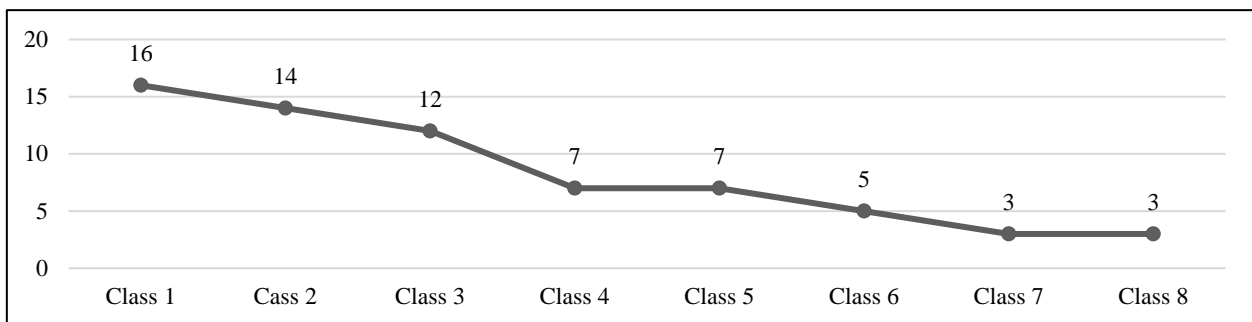

Figure 6. Aakash's Frequency of Errors by Class

Notably, Aakash exhibited a gradual improvement in the initial three classes, with a reduction of 2 errors observed in each class. Subsequently, in the following two classes, he displayed further progress and achieved a reduction to 7 errors, which remained consistent in the subsequent class. Aakash's errors continued to decrease, culminating in a final reduction to just 3 errors.

To conclude, Aakash's sensitivity as a learner is reflected in his positive response to mediational moves, leading to substantial improvement over the eight classes. However, it is important to note that this improvement is directly attributed to the effective utilization of mediational moves. Table 4 below provides a detailed account of the number of mediational moves employed in each class to mediate Aakash's essays.

Table 4 provides a detailed account of the frequency of primarily, implicit moves, used in each class to mediate Aakash's essays. In the first four classes, Aakash required seven mediational moves per class to correct 16, 14, 12, and 7 errors, respectively. In the fifth, sixth, and seventh classes, Aakash made 5, 3, and 3 errors, respectively, and 5, 5, and 3 mediational moves to remedy them. The two most explicit scaffolding strategies, providing an explanation, and providing a correct response, were either not used and or once over the eight classes.

Table 4. Frequency of Mediational Moves by Type and Class for Aakash

		Mediational Moves							
		Implicit				Explicit			
Class	Errors	Request revision	Request verification	Specify the location of an error	Specify the error	Provide exmple related to error	Provide correct response	Provide explanation	Total
1	16	✔✔	✔✔	✔	✔✔				7
2	14	✔	✔	✔✔	✔	✔	✔		7
3	12	✔✔	✔	✔✔		✔✔			7
4	07	✔✔	✔	✔✔	✔	✔			7
5	07	✔	✔	✔		✔✔			5
6	05	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔			5
7	03	✔	✔	✔✔		✔			5
8	03	✔✔		✔					3

6. Discussion

The objective of this case study was to investigate how interactionist discourse analysis (DA) could enhance the essay writing skills of ESL learners. DA is a flexible method that can be adapted to a variety of different teaching and learning environments to mediate student errors, in this case we focused on writing errors (Sherkuziyeva et al., 2023). The findings of the study revealed that DA was effective in mediating writing errors in each of the three students across all eight categories including vocabulary, subject-verb agreement, tenses, articles, active-passive voice conditionals, modal verbs, and coherence and cohesion.

These findings align with the results of previous researchers who have found that scaffolding provided by others can improve future independent performance in students (Aghaebrahimian et al., 2014; Mahdavi 2014; Khoshsima et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2023; Mauludin & Ardianti, 2017; Rashidi & Bahadori, 2018; Derakhshi 2019; Afshari et al., 2020). These results also support Gupta's (2009) assertion that while the outcome of the zone of proximal development (ZPD)

is to develop competence, its goal is to support performance. Vygotsky identified two key implications of the ZPD. First, effective instruction should be future-oriented with a focus on the student's proximal development level. Second, what a student can accomplish collaboratively or with less assistance indicates what they will be able to do autonomously in the future. Therefore, learners can be assisted in defining their immediate and future learning through scaffolding strategies, which can be internalized and transformed for later use. The growth seen by the three students in the present study support these key ideas; all exhibited reduced writing errors when instruction focused on primarily implicit mediational moves. Additionally, these reductions continued across multiple classes, suggesting they were permanent and automatized.

Effective scaffolding strategies by the teacher facilitated error identification and correction by the learner. Teacher-student collaboration in error correction is emphasized over individual effort, particularly in the beginning. As the study progressed, learners transitioned from other-regulation to self-regulation, demonstrating increasing autonomy in error correction. The literature highlights the critical role of teacher support in the form of explicit and implicit scaffolding strategies to enhance students' learning outcomes. This resonates with the findings of Mauludin and Ardianti (2017), who reported that scaffolding provided by teachers was instrumental in helping ESL students surpass their current ability level. The results of the present study further attest to the effectiveness of scaffolding strategies in promoting students' engagement and interest in the writing process, which, in turn, resulted in a significant improvement in their zone of proximal development and essay writing skills.

In line with the findings of Anton (2009), the current study recognizes the time and labor-intensive nature of DA. However, it is believed that the benefits of DA in terms of enhancing students' writing performance clearly outweigh its costs. As opposed to static assessment, which merely measures students' current ability, DA provides learners with immediate feedback related to instruction, leading to a deeper and more meaningful learning experience (Birjandi & Sarem, 2012). Furthermore, DA fosters the development of learners' educational, psychological, and cognitive functioning, as opposed to a static assessment that can often be superficial and passive (Birjandi, Naeini et al. 2012). The current study findings have important implications for pedagogical practice, underscoring the need for educators to provide focused scaffolding support to students to enhance their learning outcomes. Ultimately, DA is viewed as a powerful tool for educators to measure students' capabilities, predict their potential for future success, and design interventions that facilitate their growth in language learning (Caffrey 2006).

Linz (1987) offers the view of DA as an interaction between the teacher-intervener and the student as an active participant with the goal being to estimate the learner's modifiability and the extent to which learning is ultimately sustained. The total mediation moves for the three study participants were 112 for Rajeev, 97 for Faheem, and 67 for Aakash. An analysis of the ratio of implicit to explicit mediation moves for each show that implicit moves accounted for 87.5%, 71.1%, and 79.2% of the total moves for Rajeev, Faheem, and Aakash respectively. Also, of interest are the scores on the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) of general language abilities that placed Rajeev at the elementary level and Faheem and Aakash at the higher secondary level (grade11 or 12). While only 12% of the mediation moves for Rajeev were explicit, 30% and 20% of the moves were explicit for Faheem and Aakash respectively. Rajeev was the lowest achiever on the OPT, suggesting his English attainment did not translate into a greater need for explicit mediation moves. It is also important to remember that differences exist in the learning potential between students where some learn faster and deeper than others (Kozulin & Garb, 2001; Tzuriel, 2001).

7. Conclusion

The credibility of DA as a powerful tool for promoting ESL writing improvement was established in several ways. Firstly, dynamic assessment can help identify specific areas in which an ESL writer needs support or improvement by identifying individual strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, dynamic assessment can provide ongoing feedback and guidance to ESL writers. This feedback can help writers identify areas for improvement and develop strategies for addressing them, such as providing feedback on grammar and syntax or offering suggestions for organizing written work more effectively. Thirdly, dynamic assessment can foster metacognitive awareness in ESL writers by reflecting on their writing and receiving feedback from an evaluator. This can help writers become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and develop strategies for improving their writing. Fourthly, dynamic assessment can promote a growth mindset in ESL writers, which involves the belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed over time through effort and practice. By receiving ongoing feedback and support, ESL writers can develop confidence in their ability to improve their writing skills.

Authors contributions

Mister Aakash Kumar and Drs.William H. Rupley, David Paige and Debra McKeown were responsible for study design and revising. Mister Aakash Kuma was responsible for data collection and drafting the manuscript. Further data analyses

and revisions were done by Drs.William H. Rupley, David Paige and Debra McKeown. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Each author contributed equally to the study.

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