

DYNAMIC ASSESSMENT IN THE WRITING FOR ACADEMIC CONTEXTS COURSE

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Abstract: Dynamic assessment as one kind of interactive assessment in education is used to identify student's skills and potential. This study explored the use of dynamic assessment (DA) in assessing writing skills within the context of the Writing for Academic Contexts course and aimed to measure the impact of feedback on students' writing skills. This quantitative study was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Language and Arts, Yogyakarta State University, involving 40 students. The data were students' writing scores before and after the provision of feedback, collected through tasks of writing various essay types such as comparison and contrast, chronological order, and cause and effect. The data were analyzed using a paired-sample t-test. The results suggest that while feedback can significantly enhance scores in certain essay types, it may not consistently improve writing skills across all contexts. The study underscores the importance of dialogical feedback and mediation in facilitating student understanding and improvement. Overall, the findings highlight the complexity of assessing writing skills and advocate for a dynamic and interactive assessment approach that considers individual student needs, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of their writing abilities.

Keywords: *dynamic assessment, chronological order, cause and effect, comparison and contrast*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading, listening, writing, and speaking are four language skills that students of the English Language Education study program must master. Students learn these language skills in lectures through an intensive learning process. This learning process goes through several stages and the development of mastery at each stage needs to be measured by the achievement of students in these four language skills.

Writing skills are a person's ability to express thoughts, and ideas in written form. The process of learning writing skills is based on the curriculum of the English Language Education study program. One of the writing skills that must be mastered by students is writing in an academic context. This skill is taught in the Writing for

Academic Contexts course. This course aims to equip students with the skills necessary to convey ideas in written form to communicate functionally in an academic context. In the learning process, students are given the task of writing short essays in several ways of developing ideas.

Based on observations, many students find obstacles in their writing assignments. There are several factors that cause difficulties in writing. Two of them are the need to understand the linguistic features of a text (Hyland, 2003) and the demand to make a text cohesive based on certain textual conventions (Flowerdew, 2002). This complexity indicates that to be able to write a text in a certain communication context, students are required to not only master writing skills which include grammar skills, vocabulary, sentence structure, and idea development, but also understand the conventions of each type of text according to the communication context.

To provide a final assessment of writing products by considering these things, it is necessary to use a variety of methods so that the grades given to students reflect the ability in the stages of the learning process and its accumulation at the end of learning. Therefore, this study seeks to use the dynamic assessment (DA) of the Writing for Academic Contexts course as an assessment approach to measure students' writing ability. Students can interact with lecturers related to the need for writing improvement based on the feedback given during the learning process.

There are problems in the assessment of writing skills courses. This skill is not mastered instantly but requires a process. In the writing process, feedback from lecturers has an important role because through feedback students can improve their writing. In practice, feedback from lecturers is not always understandable to students. As a result, the improvement of writing by students is not optimal. For feedback from lecturers to be fully understood by students, there needs to be interaction between the two parties. Dialogue needs to be carried out to ensure that students really understand the feedback from lecturers and can subsequently improve their writing according to the feedback. Therefore, there needs to be a non-static assessment approach, in which all aspects are standardized. The assessment approach needs to be dynamic and interactive, which implies that the assistance in the form of input for improvement is not the same for all students, depending on the needs of individual students because they have different abilities.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

This study was carried out at the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Cultures, Yogyakarta State University, involving two groups of students taking the Writing for Academic Contexts course. The two groups were selected using the cluster sampling technique from eight groups in the study program. Because the selection used the cluster sampling technique, all selected group members were included as research subjects. The selected groups were groups E and O. Each consisted of 20 students so that in total there were 40 students as the research subjects.

Design and Procedures

This study employed a quantitative design by describing the use of dynamic assessment (DA) in the evaluation of the Writing for Academic Contexts course and

students' writing skills after using DA. The DA type applied in this study was the interactive one as this type was dialogic in nature. Through interactions and dialogues, students were expected to understand the feedback (Poehner & Lantolf, 2010). Assessment with the DA approach was carried out through the lecturer's feedback given to students to improve their writing after they understood the feedback. Feedback was provided through dialogues to ensure their understanding of the feedback. Through the use of DA, it was expected that they could develop their writing skill optimally because they were encouraged to understand feedback for performance improvement.

The research procedure was as follows. The data were collected through assignments in the Writing for Academic Contexts course. Then, the lecturer provided feedback on the students' work. Dialogues and discussions were conducted to make sure that they understood the feedback. The lecturer checked if the students thoroughly comprehended the feedback. Their understanding of the feedback was used as a basis for them to improve their work. Then, they revised their writing. After that, the lecturer scored their initial and revised works.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The research data in the form of students' writing scores were collected through assessment instruments, consisting of writing tasks and assessment rubrics. Writing assignments included writing comparative and contrast, chronological order, and cause and effect essays. For each type, students wrote two essays, namely one before being given feedback and one after being given feedback so that each student wrote six essays. Because there were 40 students, there were 240 essays as research data resources.

The writing assessment rubric included components of punctuation, grammar, content/ideas, spelling, and coherence. The five components were broken down into:

- a. content: thesis development and relevance to the topic;
- b. organization: clear ideas, logical sequence, and coherence;
- c. vocabulary: appropriate diction dan appropriate register;
- d. grammar: agreement, tenses, word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions; and
- e. mechanics: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, dan paragraphing.

For data collection, the breakdown of each of the 18 components was coded C to represent 'component', so the overall breakdown became:

Table 1. The components of the writing assessment rubric

| Code | Component |
|------|------------------------|
| C1 | thesis development |
| C2 | relevance to the topic |
| C3 | clear ideas |
| C4 | logical sequence |
| C5 | coherence |
| C6 | appropriate diction |
| C7 | appropriate register |
| C8 | agreement |

| | |
|-----|----------------|
| C9 | tenses |
| C10 | word order |
| C11 | articles |
| C12 | pronouns |
| C13 | prepositions |
| C14 | conjunctions |
| C15 | spelling |
| C16 | punctuation |
| C17 | capitalization |
| C18 | paragraphing |

To score students' writing works, each component was scored in the range of 1-5. Score 1 was the lowest score and score 5 was the highest score. Since there were 18 sub-components assessed, the lowest possible score for writing work was 18 and the highest score was 90. Scores of 18-90 were those obtained through the writing assessment rubric.

The collected data were analyzed by a quantitative descriptive technique to calculate the minimum score, maximum score, mean, and standard deviation, and a paired-sample t-test to compare writing scores before and after feedback. The analysis was performed with the IBM SPSS program version 25.

The validity in this study focused on the validity of the content related to how far the developed instrument reflected the measured competence. The instrument items were examined theoretically and referred to the description and syllabus of the Writing for Academic Contexts course. Reliability was focused on the consistency of results obtained using this instrument. The reliability was calculated by the internal consistency technique using Cronbach's Alpha and the result was 0.879, indicating that the reliability index was high.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of a quantitative descriptive analysis of the writing scores obtained before and after the provision of feedback. Scores were obtained from three writing tasks, namely writing comparison and contrast, chronological order, and cause and effect essays. The results of the analysis included the minimum score, maximum score, mean score, and standard deviation. To find out whether there were differences in the writing scores obtained before and after the provision of feedback, the results of the analysis with a paired-sample t-test are presented.

Descriptive analysis results

a. Comparison and contrast

For comparison and contrast essays in Class E and Class O, the results of the analysis in Table 1 show a tendency that the writing scores after feedback are higher than those before feedback. This can be seen from the minimum, maximum, and mean scores. The scores after feedback tend to have a wider range. This is indicated by the standard deviation.

Table 1: Comparison and contrast essay scores before and after feedback in Class E and Class O

| Descriptive Statistics Class E | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| BEFORE | 20 | 66 | 83 | 74.10 | 4.471 |
| AFTER | 20 | 70 | 88 | 75.90 | 4.541 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | |
| Descriptive Statistics Class O | | | | | |
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| BEFORE | 20 | 74.00 | 80.00 | 77.2500 | 1.88833 |
| AFTER | 20 | 75.00 | 82.00 | 77.9500 | 2.11449 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | |

b. Chronological order

For chronological order essays in Class E and Class O, the results of the analysis in Table 2 show a tendency that the writing scores after feedback are higher than those before feedback. The results can be seen from the minimum, maximum, and mean scores. The scores after feedback tend to have a wider range. This is indicated by the standard deviation.

Table 2: Chronological order essay scores before and after feedback in Class E and Class O

| Descriptive Statistics Class E | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| BEFORE | 20 | 66.00 | 88.00 | 71.5500 | 5.03122 |
| AFTER | 20 | 69.00 | 88.00 | 74.0500 | 5.83926 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | |
| Descriptive Statistics Class O | | | | | |
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| BEFORE | 20 | 74.00 | 81.00 | 76.4000 | 2.16187 |
| AFTER | 20 | 73.00 | 82.00 | 76.4500 | 2.37254 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | |

c. Cause and effect

For the cause-and-effect essays in Class E and Class O, the results of the analysis in Table 3 show a tendency that the writing scores after feedback are higher than those before feedback. This can be seen from the minimum, maximum, and mean scores. The scores after feedback tend to have a wider range. The standard deviation indicates this.

Table 3: Cause and effect essay scores before and after feedback in Class E and Class O

| Descriptive Statistics Class E | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| BEFORE | 20 | 67.00 | 85.00 | 73.2000 | 3.91488 |
| AFTER | 20 | 70.00 | 88.00 | 75.9500 | 4.55926 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | |
| Descriptive Statistics Class O | | | | | |
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| BEFORE | 20 | 74.00 | 81.00 | 76.4000 | 2.16187 |
| AFTER | 20 | 73.00 | 82.00 | 76.9000 | 3.12504 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | |

Results of a paired-sample t-test

a. Comparison and contrast

The results of a paired-sample t-test for comparison and contrast essay scores in Class E are shown in Table 4. A t-value of -2.538 with $p < 0.05$ indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the writing scores before feedback and those after feedback. The results of a paired-sample t-test for comparison and contrast essay scores in Class O are also shown in Table 4. A t-value of -3.39 with $p < 0.05$ also indicates a statistically significant difference. In other words, giving feedback increases the scores significantly.

Table 4: Results of a paired-sample t-test for comparison and contrast essay scores before and after feedback in Class E and Class O

| Paired Samples Test Class E | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|---|-------|-------|----|-----------------|
| Paired Differences | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | BEFORE - AFTER | -1.800 | 3.172 | .709 | -3.285 | -.315 | 2.538 | 19 | .020 |

| Paired Samples Test Class O | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------|----------------|-----------------|---|---------|-------|----|-----------------|
| Paired Differences | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | BEFORE - AFTER | -.70000 | .92338 | .20647 | -1.13216 | -.26784 | 3.390 | 19 | .003 |

b. Chronological order

The results of a paired-sample t-test for chronological order essay scores in Class E are shown in Table 5. A t value of -1.474 with $p > 0.05$ indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores before feedback and those after feedback. The results of a paired-sample t-test for chronological order essay scores in Class O are also shown in Table 5. A t value of -0.089 with $p > 0.05$ indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores before the feedback and those after the feedback. In other words, giving feedback does not significantly improve the scores.

Table 5: Results of a paired-sample t-test for chronological order essay scores before and after feedback in Class E and Class O

| Paired Samples Test Class E | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|-----------------|---|---------|--------|----|-----------------|
| Paired Differences | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Mean | Std. Dev. | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | BEFORE - AFTER | 2.50000 | 7.58461 | 1.69597 | -6.04971 | 1.04971 | -1.474 | 19 | .157 |

| Paired Samples Test Class O | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|------------|---|---------|-------|----|-----------------|
| Paired Differences | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Mean | Std. Dev. | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | BEFORE - AFTER | -.05000 | 2.50210 | .55949 | -1.22102 | 1.12102 | -.089 | 19 | .930 |

c. Cause and effect

The results of a paired-sample t-test for cause-and-effect essay scores in Class E are shown in Table 11. A t-value of -6.329 with $p < 0.05$ indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the scores before the feedback and those after the feedback. In other words, giving feedback increases the scores significantly. On the other hand, the results of a paired-sample t-test for cause-and-effect essay scores in Class O, with a t-value of -1.209 with $p > 0.05$ indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores before the feedback and those after the feedback. In other words, giving feedback does not significantly improve the scores in Class O

Table 6: Results of a paired-sample t-test for cause-effect essay scores before and after feedback in Class E and Class O

| Paired Samples Test Class E | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|------------|---|---------|--------|----|-----------------|
| Paired Differences | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Mean | Std. Dev. | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | BEFORE - AFTER | -2.75000 | 1.94327 | .43453 | -3.65948 | 1.84052 | -6.329 | 19 | .000 |

| Paired Samples Test | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|------------|---|--------|--------|----|-----------------|
| Paired Differences | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Mean | Std. Dev. | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | BEFORE - AFTER | -.50000 | 1.84961 | .41359 | -1.36564 | .36564 | -1.209 | 19 | .242 |

Discussion

Dynamic assessment (DA) is an evaluative approach that integrates both assessment and instruction, emphasizing the interaction between the evaluator and the learner (Rassaei, 2023). In the context of the Writing for Academic Contexts course, DA offers a perspective on students' writing skills to capture the developmental track of their abilities. This approach is particularly effective in assessing various essay types such as comparison and contrast, chronological order, and cause and effect, which are integral to academic writing. Based on the findings, providing feedback as part of DA was capable of improving the writing scores of all types of essays. This was indicated by the mean scores after feedback. The results of descriptive statistical analysis showed that the mean scores for writing all types of essays after feedback

tended to be higher than those before feedback. These findings suggest that DA, with its focus on formative feedback could effectively support the students' development of academic writing knowledge and skills (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2019; Ebadi & Bashir, 2021; Rassaei, 2023).

However, not all of these increases in the study were statistically significant. This was in line with Sardarianpour and Kolahi's research result (2021) when they compared dynamic assessment with negotiated assessment. Their finding showed that even though the dynamic assessment improved students' scores, the students who were assessed using a negotiated assessment had better scores than those assessed by dynamic assessment.

For comparison and contrast essays, providing feedback was capable of significantly improving scores in both classes. For chronological-order essays, giving feedback could not significantly improve scores in either class. For cause-and-effect essays, giving feedback was capable of significantly improving the scores in Class E, but in Class O giving feedback could not increase the scores significantly.

Inconsistent research results show that there are aspects that need to be improved in providing feedback as part of DA. DA is grounded in the idea of integrating assessment with instruction to increase assessment effectiveness, thus facilitating learning and development (Kafipour & Khosnood, 2023). Feedback needs to be implemented dialogically (Xiaoxiao & Yan, 2010). Feedback is not a one-way communication. It is an interactive and dialogic process where the assessor engages with the learner, providing scaffolding that helps the learner to understand their errors and learn how to correct them. Through dialogue, the learner and assessor co-construct knowledge, making the learning experience more meaningful and effective. With an adequate understanding of feedback, they can improve their writing assignments.

Feedback should serve as mediation (Shrestha & Coffin, 2012). This means that feedback must be able to bridge the abilities that students already have as reflected in the writing before the provision of feedback with the skills that are expected to be mastered, as reflected in the writing after the provision of feedback. A study conducted by Ebadi & Rahimi (2019) highlighted the feedback in DA could mediate the learner's academic writing skills as the evaluator guided them through their zone of proximal development (ZPD). This interaction is crucial, where it could assess learners' current abilities as well as contribute for their skill development.

To perform functions as expected, dialogical feedback and mediation require relatively long periods, demand experience and expertise, and limit the level of practicality (Derakhshan & Kordjazi, 2015). Feedback is the driving force behind DA, transforming assessment from a mere evaluative exercise into a developmental tool that fosters learning and growth. Unmet feedback requirements make some research results inconsistent.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results of research and discussion, the implementation of dynamic assessment (DA) in the Writing for Academic Contexts course revealed a complex picture of its impact on students' writing skills. The provision of feedback for students' writing works has not shown consistent results when viewed from the significance of statistical test results. Giving feedback can improve students' writing skills for certain types of essays. However, for other types of essays, giving feedback cannot significantly improve students' writing skills. For certain classes with specific essay

writing assignments, providing feedback can improve students' writing skills. For other classes with specific essay writing assignments, giving feedback cannot significantly improve students' writing skills. It can be concluded that while some students demonstrated marked improvement in their writing abilities, others exhibited minimal or no progress, suggesting that the effectiveness of DA may require a deeper exploration of the other possible factors.

In accordance with the views of experts and relevant research results, the provision of feedback should be done dialogically. The feedback given by the lecturer must be fully understood by students so that students can improve their writing assignments. Feedback must also be able to bridge the abilities that have been mastered by students with the projected abilities. It is expected that the students will be able to engage with the feedback actively, applying it to refine their writing skills and showing noticeable improvement. Other factors such as differing levels of prior knowledge, motivation, and learning styles, nevertheless, need to be considered when researching DA.

Future studies should focus on identifying the specific conditions under which DA is most effective, including the characteristics of students who benefit the most from this approach. Additionally, exploring the role of different types of feedback and the frequency of assessment interactions could provide valuable insights into optimizing DA practices. By understanding and addressing the factors contributing to these varied outcomes, teachers can better harness the potential of DA to support all students in developing their academic writing skills.

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