

## **Authenticity in Online Dynamic Assessment: Iranian EFL Learners' Perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

Theoretically emerged from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of mind, Dynamic Assessment (DA) considers learning as a mediated social enterprise relying on language authenticity in targeting learners' individual and social development. Considering the growing usage of online DA writing courses, this study examined the perspectives of learners on the ways through which authenticity of mediation contributed to their development. Participants of this study were instructed academic writing through Google Docs in an online writing course for two months. Then, post study structured interviews were conducted. Thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts and the emerged themes were analyzed considering the main aspects of the notion of authenticity. According to the results, authenticity is well-supported in online mediation as it not only provides learners with linguistic models but also targets their quality of interactions. Moreover, it contributes to learners' academic identities and their acculturation into the target language. The findings highlight the fact that online DA mediation is inclusive enough to address authenticity in foreign language learning.

**Keywords:** Authenticity, Mediation, Online dynamic assessment, Writing instruction, Learners' Perspectives

### **Introduction**

In Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of mind learning is considered as a social enterprise mediated by cultural and social artifacts the most important of which is language. Based on sociocultural theory of mind, language contributes to emerging individual's previously unknown abilities and ways of conceptualizing the world.

Theoretically grounded in sociocultural theory of mind, DA regards emergent abilities as a part of learners' Zone of Potential Development (ZPD) in contradiction to the already developed abilities belonging to their Zone of Actual Development (ZAD) (Stoynoff, 2012). DA targets learners' ZPD through engaging them in interactions with experts. In this way, DA highlights the significance of contextually and mentally situated mediation (i.e. support) to enhance learners' functioning. Based on DA, mediation targets the social and individualized aspects of language learning through its focus on the

appropriation of the language of the social interactions for individualized purposes (Poehner, Zhang, & Lu, 2014).

Although DA is applicable to classroom and online contexts of instruction, there has been a growing emphasis on the integration of its online form in academic writing courses (e.g., Sharma, 2006; Stoyhoff, 2012). Online DA-based writing studies have reported among other things their advantages in overcoming the time and place limitations (Apple, Reis Bergan, Adams, & Saunders, 2011), encouraging team and pair work (Guerra & Bota, 2011), meeting learners' on the spot needs and triggering their language skills (Chen, 2016). They were mainly used to examine learners' responses to online mediation, details of their writing development and the ways through which they extend their mental functioning to engage in knowledge negotiation and construction (Ableeva, 2010).

Among the unexplored issues in online DA-based studies are the nature of mediation itself and how it targets learners' individual and social development as reflected in the notion of authenticity. Authenticity as the fully-fledged form of the notion of genuineness reveals the potentials of learning means and procedures for meeting learners' individual and social needs (Pinner, 2016). More specifically, it shows how they target learners' linguistic needs and/or influence their academic identities and social performance. Given that DA regards mediation as the main means of learners' development, this study critically examined the nature of mediation as used in an online DA-based writing course. In so doing, it reflected the perspectives of the participants as the main users of the mediation to shed a new light on its contribution to different aspects of their development.

## **Fundamental Concepts of the Study**

### **Dynamic Assessment**

Dynamic assessment, as the main emergent assessment procedure of sociocultural theory of mind, rejects the sense of the fixed ability or inability which is implied by traditional testing (Lidz & Gindis, 2003). It focuses on the details and processes of learning and examines learners' progression in their ZPD. According to Vygotsky (1978), ZPD refers to the distance between learners' level of independent performance and their potential levels of development as determined through their collaboration with a more capable peer. Vygotsky (1978) primarily focused on learners' ZPD and stated that teaching and assessment should be adjusted to learners' ZPD rather than their past abilities. DA, therefore, allows for the simultaneous assessment and instruction of learners through providing them with mediation to enhance their functioning. Following this principle, DA researchers use a set of mediation levels arranged from implicit to explicit to let the learners correct their errors individually and/or with the help of the mediator. The resultant diagnoses show learners' departure points in learning and the amount of support they need for independent functioning (Poehner et al., 2014).

## Mediation

Mediation in DA tradition is offered in two main approaches known as *interventionist* and *interactionist* respectively (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). The former approach, referred to as the *sandwich* format, involves a test-intervention-retest sequence. It allows for using pre-established interventions in separate sessions in relation to large groups of learners. The interactionist approach, however, is inclined to the assessment of the dynamics of the learners' development in qualitative studies. Mediation in this approach is not established in advance; it is offered in dialogic interactions with learners as they are engaged in problem-solving. In this approach, the mediator continually examines mediation's nature in relation to learners' ZPD. This approach, which has been described as the *cake* format, is inherently appropriate for examining individuals' process of development.

The process of using mediation to solve a problem will lead to internalization. Lantolf (2000) believes that internalization is the process of reconstructing socially mediated forms of activities based on an inner and psychological plan. Internalization involves bringing about higher forms of functioning. Any form of higher mental functioning requires an external social stage through which its development becomes internal. Thus, functions first develop socially, and internalization makes them individualized. This is called genetic law of development. In sociocultural theory of mind, genetic law of development shows how mental functions go through changes over time to become individualized (Block, 2003).

## Authenticity

As a controversial notion in language teaching, authenticity became an issue with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1970s. It has brought a focus on the realism of language in relation to the purposes it aims at deserving in teaching (Buendgens-Kosten, 2014). Authenticity is applied to all manifestations of language in teaching such as teaching means, procedures and materials (Pinner, 2016).

Authenticity at its lowest level (Genuineness) focuses on oral and written language in isolation; whether it meets learners' linguistic needs and provides good linguistic models. At its higher level, however, authenticity examines the relationship between language and readers; whether it provides them with the chance of meaningful learning through addressing their needs and corresponding to their normal learning activities. The basic idea is that written and oral texts should empower learners to do more than manipulating language forms and integrating them in their subsequent productions (Buendgens-Kosten, 2014).

Pinner (2016) argues that traditional definitions of the notion of authenticity are restricted by their reductionist perspectives which oversimplify learners' needs and language learning contexts. He rejects the "notorious" dichotomy of native/nonnative materials and argues that authenticity should be revisited for language teachers and learners to show how effective language learning is. He presents a model of investigating authenticity which targets the interplay between previously restricted definitions of this notion and the dynamic, social and interactive aspects of language learning. In Pinner's (2016) words, authenticity is a multifaceted concept with both social and contextual

dimensions. The contextual or the practical aspect includes language use domain (whether the employed manifestation of language represents the real language in use) and context domain (whether the employed manifestation of language represents the real nature of interactions between learners and teachers). As it can be noticed, the two domains of the contextual or the practical aspect focus on providing good linguistic models and depicting the knowledge transfer process from teachers to learners respectively. The social or the theoretical aspect, however, includes individual (whether the employed manifestation of language targets learners' real identities or the way they represent themselves) and community (whether the employed texts facilitate acculturation into target language community) domains. The two domains of the social or the theoretical aspect focus on empowering learners to express their identities linguistically and to consider themselves as members of the language users' community. Pinner (2016) argues that by viewing authenticity as a multifaceted and dynamic component of language learning, the teachers and researchers will be able to examine the nature of learning as a situated, interacted and mediated process. He also states that authenticity is not an inherent feature, it is about creating texts which fit particular situations and aims.

Given that mediation in DA involves creating and using support attuned to social and individualized aspects of learning situations and demands, the notion of authenticity is specifically related to it. Authenticity, also, directly relates to the advent of new technologies which have provided easy access to new language materials and approaches coupled with their emphasis on autonomous and independent functioning in language learning (Gilmore, 2007). Moreover, since learners are the main users of mediation, they can comment on its in/appropriateness in influencing different aspects of their development. Considering these facts, this study is devoted to investigating mediation authenticity based on learners' perspectives.

## **Literature Review**

Following the DA principle of learners' collaborative interaction with a more capable individual, a number of researchers examined learners' development in online writing courses. Shrestha and Coffin (2012), for example, examined the contribution of the text-based mediation provided via e-mail to the development of learners' academic writing. The researchers conclude that DA framework works as an effective tool for helping learners with their academic writing problems. Darhower (2007) used the genetic law of development of the DA tradition to investigate the development process of two university students in the oral production of past narrations. According to the researcher, DA revealed learners' linguistic needs and provided information on both their ZPD and their levels of independent performance. Madnani, Burstein, Elliot, Beigman Klebanov, Andreyev and Schwartz (2018) stated that online DA can improve writing in a self-regulated manner by using natural language processing methods to provide feedback on the errors of learners.

Mathew, Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2017) investigated the efficacy of electronically offered mediation which was supported by face-to face interactions. In so doing, they trained 12 students, who were taking the foundation program of the Middle East College (MEC) using a combination of online and open ended dialogic mediation.

The study suggests that electronic mediation which is attuned to learners' ZPD is more effective than the corrective feedback which is offered based on the assessor's guess of their needs. Gauthier and Karsenti (2018) argue that the quality of online mediation can be increased by the cognitive prompts provided on the side of the teacher as they strengthen learners' metacognitive strategies and increase their feeling of confidence and motivation in writing. Ebadi (2016) explored the reciprocity typologies of SCMC (Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication) in teaching two Iranian EFL learners from two different universities across the world. Having used the thematic analysis framework of data analysis, the researcher presented a pattern of collaborative interaction, which confirmed the step-to-step development of learners' ZPD over grammatical structures. Zhang, Wanyi and Wanyi (2013) present a DA framework of writing instruction via web-based tools. The framework, which combines features of DA and writing process pedagogy, teaches and assesses students in writing different genres of texts. Having applied the framework to Chinese students' writing activities, the researchers stated that its advantages are more noticeable when the quality and objectives of mediation are determined in advance and the coherence of DA sessions are guaranteed. Thoušny and Bradley (2014) explored the extent to which DA principles can be applied to peer feedback on revising online written reports. In doing that, they asked 100 Swedish students who were taking an ESP writing course in computer engineering to work in groups of three and to use Google Drive for writing reports on a chosen topic. All students in this study were trained on how to apply DA-based mediation. Results indicated that students' interactions and interventions all directed writing development.

Some studies have focused on students' views on the potentials of online DA in developing writing skill. Exploring the views of Iranian EFL learners toward the efficiency of Google Docs in peer editing, Ebadi and Rahimi (2017, 2018) stated that learners have a positive view on the impact of online mediation in developing their academic writing skills because they did not report any inconvenience in their usage of it. Lin and Yang (2013) conducted group interviews and stated that online DA positively affected students' motivation for learning because they benefited from the shared information in their collaboration. Online DA, also, promoted their confidence in language teaching. Hedin (2012) believes that students regard mediation they received through collaborative writing quite contributing to the positive changes in their writings. Chu, Kennedy and Mak (2009) argue that students' positive views toward online mediation originates mainly from the point that it is easy to use.

Presented studies show that online DA can positively influence students' writing development, and students have positive views toward using it. However, different features of the mediation they receive through online DA including its authenticity manifestations have not been explored yet. Therefore, exploring learners' views on the nature of authenticity as reflected in online mediation might provide new insights into online teaching of writing skills. It should be mentioned that unlike the previous studies in which the offered mediation was oral and/or written (e.g., Birjandi & Ebadi, 2012; Darhower, 2007; Poehner et al., 2014), in this study the researcher's access to the affordances of online communication made the mediation in a mixture of contextual and written forms arranged from the most implicit to the most explicit form based on the learners' responses to mediation.

## Methodology

### Design of the study

The first part of this study involved conducting an online DA-based writing course to investigate learners' development in academic writing. Following prominent DA studies that recommend examining the development of learners in details (e.g., Ableeva 2010; Oskoz, 2005; Poehner, 2005; Shrestha & Coffin, 2012), this study gave priority to the qualitative method to capture the process oriented nature of learners' development. It used Vygotsky's genetic law of development to trace learners' movement across three levels of functioning characterize their step-to-step development. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) state that microgenetic development happens in the form of movement from the stage of *other-regulation* (wherein a learner totally relies on the researcher's support in solving a problem), to the *partial-regulation* stage (when he acquires the skill partially, but still needs the researcher's help) and *self-regulation* (where he internalizes the mediation completely and acts independently). Based on Vygotsky's genetic law of development, changes in learners' reciprocity to the more implicit levels of mediation represent their development from the stage of other regulation to partial and self-regulation (Ebadi, 2016). In our study, learners needed fewer and less explicit forms of mediation in subsequent sessions of their instruction represented microgenetic development in writing.

### Participants and Context of the Study

Participants of this study were two B.A level students of English at a university in Iran. They were vetted in terms of their writing proficiency levels from a large group of students who were sent the DIALANG link (a free online diagnostic assessment tool in language learning available at <https://dialangweb.lancaster.ac.uk/>). They were asked to take its English writing exam and to send the researcher their exams results. The DIALANG results were used as a placement test to determine learners' levels of writing ability. Based on DIALANG results, which cover a range of levels from A1 (Breakthrough) and A2 (wastage) as Basic User, B1 (Threshold) and B2 (Vantage) as Independent User to C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) and C2 (Mastery) as Proficient User, students 1 and 2 were at B1 and B2 respectively.

### Mediation Procedure

The online writing course was conducted in eight sessions from July to August 2017. In each session, learners wrote an academic text in about 150 words based on the topics selected by the first author. The two learners received mediation mainly after finishing their texts and sharing them with the researcher. For sharing academic texts, each learner pushed the *Check* mark of his/her Google Docs page, which showed that he/she completed his/her writing, and touched the "*Add People*" icon, where he/she entered the researcher's email address. The email, which was in the form of an invitation to edit the text, included a small box (*Open in Docs*). By touching that box, the researcher could see the text and comment on it. Since the learner had the software opened at the time, he/she could see the researcher's comments.

This study used the interactionist DA approach to target learners' academic writing errors using written and contextual online mediation in a dialogic way. Following DA principles, this study presented mediation based on the order started with the most implicit level and continued with other explicit forms of it until errors were corrected by either the learners themselves or the researcher. In doing that, learners were first asked to identify their academic writing errors within a given sentence even with the researcher's assistance, which was in the form of bolding the erroneous sentence. At the second level of mediation, the error was specified for the learners; it was italicized by the researcher. At the next level of mediation learners received instructional materials and links. Learners, at the fourth level of correction, were offered some choices. Finally, learners received the most explicit level of mediation wherein the researcher explained and corrected their academic writing errors. Thus, it can be mentioned that mediation levels 1 and 2 involved using contextual support, while levels 3,4 and 5 involved written support. Table 1, below, represents the mediation categories in this study.

Table 1  
*Mediation Categories of the Study*

<b>Mediation Levels</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	Contextual	bolding the erroneous sentence
2	Contextual	italicizing the erroneous parts
3	Written	sharing links and electronic materials
4	Written	offering suggestions
5	Written	correcting related errors by researcher

To help the readers get a more precise impression of the mediation procedure of the study some examples of learners' responses to the mediation levels of the study are presented.

### **Level 1. Bolding the Erroneous Sentences**

The most implicit mediation level in this study was bolding the erroneous sentences. Since both the researcher and learners were online at the same time, the researcher could easily trace the changes happened as a result of this level of support. The following example is relevant here.

#### **Student 2(DA2: Simple Present Passive)**

S2. Natural places are endanger by humans.

**Mediator. Natural places are endanger by humans.** (the first level of mediation).

S2. Natural places are endangered by humans.

### **Level 2. Italicizing the Erroneous Parts**

The next implicit mediation level in this study, which involved italicizing the erroneous sentence by the mediator, encouraged both a top down and a bottom up analyses of sentences, as it triggered examining the syntax or punctuation at both the sentence and word levels.

#### **Student 1 (DA1: Noun Determiners)**

**S1.** I asked question from experienced people.

**Mediator.** I asked question from experienced people. (the first level of mediation).

**S1.-**

**Mediator.** I asked *question* from experienced people. (the second level of mediation).

**S1.** I asked that question from experienced people.

#### **Level 3. Sharing Links and Electronic Materials**

Given that the first and second mediation levels led to identifying academic writing errors, learners who needed a further level of mediation could use the materials they were sent via Google Docs to fill their knowledge gaps.

#### **Student 1 (DA2: Plural Nouns)**

**S1.** We can use too many facility, because this cities has some facility to comparison with small cities.

**Mediator.** We can use too many facility,.... (the first level of mediation)

**S1. -**

**Mediator.** We can use too *many facility* ,.... (the second level of mediation)

**S1. –**

**Mediator.** Receiving instructional materials (the third level of mediation) (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/determiners/determiners-and-types-of-noun>)

**S1.** *We can use too many facilities, ....*

#### **Level 4. Offering Suggestions**

The fourth level of mediation aimed at making learners examine their academic writing errors considering the choices they were offered (Birjandi & Ebadi, 2012). Since learners had no more interaction with the mediator at this stage, their corrections could mainly be contributed to their own criteria of what is correct and/or their mere guesses.

#### **Student 1 (DA3: Passive Voice of Simple Present)**

**S1.** Sometimes parents want their children to commit crimes. In this situation parents must be punished until crimes be restricted.

**Mediator.** In this situation parents must be punished until crimes *be* restricted. (the first, second and third levels of mediation)

**S1.** In this situation parents must be punished until crimes *be* restricted.



**Mediator.** Presenting some choices (are, is, was, were) (the fourth level of mediation)

**S1.** In this situation parents must be punished until crimes are restricted.

### **Level 5. Correcting Related Errors by the Researcher**

As mentioned before, the fifth level of mediation involved correcting errors with complete reliance on the mediator. At this stage, learners had not only the chance of internalizing mediation but also asking their questions and receiving to the point explanations. Below, a relevant example to this mediation strategy is presented.

#### **Student 2 (DA2: Parallel Structures)**

**S2.** government has three roles; generate public goods, creating economic security at the country and maintaining the borders of the country.

**Mediator.** ....generate public goods, creating economic security at the country and maintaining the borders of the country (first level of mediation)

**S2.** ....generate public goods, creating economic security at the country and maintaining the country borders.

**Mediator.** ....generate public goods, creating economic security at the country and maintaining the country borders (second level of mediation).

**S2.** ....produce public goods, creating economic security at the country and maintaining the country borders.

**Mediator.** Sending instructional materials and/or links (third level of mediation) (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/623/1/>)

**S2.** production public goods, creating economic security at the country and maintaining the country borders.

**Mediator.** Suggesting some choices (producing, produced, produces, productions) (fourth level of mediation)

**S2.** ....productions public goods, creating economic security at the country and maintaining the borders of the country.

**Mediator.** Correcting the error at hand and explaining about it. (fifth level of mediation)

The level of mediation each learner needed for correction showed his/her departure point in overcoming each error and the amount of support he/she needed for independent error correction. Through examining learners' reaction to similar errors in future sessions, the researcher could determine their degree and the stages of development. As an example, the correct usage of "the" before ordinal numbers in the writing of student 1 can be referred to.

The two following episodes target the first and second times student 1 was corrected for his negligence of using "the" before ordinal numbers. As it is clear, the first time he got the mediation in relation to this error, he was at the other regulation stage characterized by his total dependence on the researcher's support. Therefore, it can be claimed that for his future independent correction, student 1 needed development in both error recognition and development.

#### **S1 (Using "the" Before Ordinal Numbers)**

It wasn't first time she was here.

**Mediator.** (the first level of mediation)

**S1.** -.

**Mediator.** (the second level of mediation)

**S1.** *It wasn't a first time she was there.*

**Mediator.** (the third level of mediation)

**S1.** *It wasn't the first time she was there.*

Based on the next episode, the second time student 1 encountered the same problem, he needed only the first two levels of mediation. This showed his getting independence in correcting this error as he only needed support in error recognition.

### **S1 (Reexamination of Using “the” Before Ordinal Numbers)**

Second effect of tv is that family is away from each other.

**Mediator.** (the first level of mediation)

**S1.** the second effect of tv is that family is away from each other

### **Instrumentation: Structured interviews**

At the second stage of the study, post study asynchronous online interviews were conducted at the end of the project to reveal the learners' perspectives on how authenticity was reflected in their online mediation. Interview questions were sent to the learners' Google Docs pages. They were given the opportunity to discuss their misunderstanding with the researcher before answering the questions.

Concerning the four previously introduced aspects of the authenticity notion, this study analyzed the interview data in order to reveal the main manifestation(s) of each aspect. More specifically, this study deductively extracted the manifestation(s) of the four predetermined points for each student separately.

### **Results and Discussion**

Analysis of interview data led to the emergent of the following patterns represented in table 2.

Table 2  
*Post Study Interview Results*

<b>Questions</b>		<b>Summary of the responses of student 1</b>	<b>Summary of the responses of students 2</b>
1	The main manifestation(s) of language use authenticity in mediation	Instructional links and comments	Interaction with an expert, gradual trigger of linguistic knowledge
2	The main manifestation(s) of context authenticity in mediation	Interaction increase	Slow turn taking

3	The main manifestation(s) of individual authenticity in mediation	Developing new identities through focus on critical thinking	Focus on the developing self
4	The main manifestation(s) of social authenticity in mediation	Gradual delivering independence to learners	Online collaboration

The first aspect of authenticity as targeted in this study was domain or language use; whether different forms of online mediation facilitated getting linguistic models. According to the statements of the learners, language use authenticity was manifested clearly in this study. Student 2, for example, stated that mediation positively influenced internalizing new linguistic knowledge through interaction with the expert who had a good knowledge of academic writing skills. She stated that, *“I have always wanted working with a knowledgeable person who examines my writings carefully and like a private teacher helps me when I need it... I feel more motivated and learn better in this way.”* The quotation targets one of the main tenets of DA based on which learners need to interact with an expert who has control over different aspects of the focused issue. It also clearly shows that the program increased learners' investment in learning. Norton and McKinney (2011) believe that learning investment has to do with the development of language skills. Student 2 also mentioned that the step by step nature of mediation (in particular levels 1 and 2) contributed to her writing accuracy through facilitating her error recognition and correction. In this way, DA mediation not only triggered her existing linguistic knowledge but also challenged her view on the notion of correctness. Based on her speeches, she did not look at the incorrect structures as signs of total lack of knowledge rather she examined the amount of support was needed to correct each of them and, then, determined to what extent those structures were away from their correct forms. Therefore, it can be argued that the new sense of correctness for student 2 was directly influenced by the nature of online mediation in this DA study.

Student 1 revealed another way of manifesting domain use in online DA mediation by saying that he improved the linguistic aspect of his writing through studying the instructional links he received (level 3) and examining the structure of the researcher's comments (level 5). As a general fact, although researcher's comments were mainly used as a message conveyor means in this study, student 1 revealed another aspect of its developmental potential by reflecting their grammar and punctuation in his sentences. The following episode, for example, shows that student 1 learned the application of comma through his interactions with the researcher.

#### **Student 1 (DA4: Comma)**

University entrance exam will not be effected by factors such as money concor classes and books.

**Mediator. University entrance exam will not be effected by factors such as money concor classes and books.** (the first level of mediation)

S1. -

**Mediator. University entrance exam will not be effected by factors such as money concor classes and books.** (the second level of mediation)

S1. doroste alan? (is it right?)

**Mediator.** Think of a punctuation mark which has different functions such as separating time adverbs, conjunctions, relative clauses, etc. from other parts of the sentence.

**S1.** University entrance exam will not be effected by factors such as money, conxor classes, and books.

Regarding context authenticity which covers the efficacy of interactions, student 1 stated that the online mediation led to an increase in his interactions with the researcher. Although correction mainly started with the researcher's initial level of mediation, the nature of online communication encouraged more interaction to check his understanding of the comments and the correctness of his revision, and to fill his knowledge gaps. Learner initiative interaction sequence, which is a requirement of effective learning through promoting comprehensible input and output, has been recognized as an inherent feature of online collaboration (Ziegler & Mackey, 2017). Another distinguishing feature of online mediation was the slow turn taking process, which gave learners more time to construct their sentences and to examine their accuracy. The following example shows that student 2 intentionally decreased the turn taking process through asking for more correction time.

**Student 2 (DA3: simple present tense)**

TV work in both positive and negative ways.

**Mediator. TV work in both positive and negative ways.** (The first level of mediation).

**S2.** *lotfan sabr konid, mitonam moshkel ro peida knoam. (wait please. I think I can find the wrong part if I have more time).*

**S2.** TV works in both positive and negative ways.

Sauro (2009) believes that slow turn taking works as a source of cognitive relief in the Internet context because it facilitates remembering the required information. Our study further showed that it helped with the fast movement of learners toward the self-regulation stage because they usually needed no more mediation in relation to such errors. Trinder (2017) states that such a deliberate practice of using English in online communication indicates a preference for self-regulated learning. According to student 2, the feature led to getting higher levels of writing accuracy and the development of revision ability too. Therefore, it can be stated that context authenticity was manifested in terms of increasing the knowledge transfer from the researcher to the learners and manipulating the context potentials to correct errors.

As far as individual authenticity is concerned, students emphasized that the individualized nature of mediation in the program, which led to targeting their specific errors, increased their responsibility toward their texts and affected their academic identities. Student 2, for example, stated that *"I think I am a writer and a writing teacher.....at first, I write. Next, I correct..... In the past, teachers did not help at university. But, I can help myself now"*. It is assumed that the "developing -self" view of this DA study created motivation for learners to decrease the distance between their real-self and ideal-self. DA mediation could capture the complexity of identity construction (Fang, 2017) by breaking down their past selves (*a university student in the need of writing instruction*) and reconfiguring them (*a university student who believes that she can help herself in writing*) through employing the simultaneous teaching and assessment

principle of DA and providing learners with mediation during the assessment process to enhance their functioning. It should be mentioned that following Ivanič (1998), this study defines academic identity as learners' linguistic self-representation which can be deduced from the texts they create. It is the persona the writers adopt when they are writing; "the voice they want their audience to hear" (p. 24-29). Fang (2017) believes that academic identities are transforming across different situations and changes in learners' self-confidence and linguistic knowledge result in changes in their academic identities. As a matter of fact, there were numerous cases where students of our study stated that they felt changes in their academic identities. They reasoned that before or even at the beginning of this study, they felt that they were linguistically weak and what they wanted to write was restricted by their limited knowledge. In other words, they had some limited structures in their minds and their writings were restricted or negatively influenced by them. The issue had decreased their confidence over time. At the end of the study, however, they stated that the way they wrote was more influenced by their power of manipulating forms and structures in the way that makes them more closed to their intentions. More specifically, they stated that their identities were positively changed noticeably.

The main contribution of the online mediation to academic identity, according to student 1, happened through improving critical thinking. He stated that, "*levels 1, 2, and 4 encouraged thinking over different structures and/or comparing them ... it made me more familiar with different grammatical and punctuation forms and the subtle differences between them.... Now, I know why some sentences are wrong...*". According to Banegas and Villacañas de Castro (2016), critical thinking can be exercised by involving students in analyzing text and structures, which promotes their language awareness and logical evaluation through self-editing. According to student 1, this requirement of critical thinking was clearly manifested in the mediation levels which involved analyzing the structure and form on the side of learners. The sentence "... *now, I know why some sentences are wrong...*" further shows that, critical thinking in our DA based study was a step toward the socially situated practice of evaluating what is right or wrong.

The following episode shows the performance of the student 1 in relation to a verb formation error. As it is clear, the quality of the first two levels of mediation triggered his already existing knowledge.

**Student 1 (DA8: verb formation)**

education system will adjustment.

**Mediator. education system will adjustment.** (the first level of mediation)

**S1.-**

**Mediator. education system will adjustment.** (the second level of mediation)

**S1.** Education system will adjust.

In relation to social authenticity, it was noticed that DA mediation facilitated learners' acculturation in academic writing through collaborative behavior during task completion. Acculturation, in our study, refers to the learning of social conventions of target language writers, so that learners consider themselves as members of the community of the academic writers of the English language. Student 2 mentioned that online mediation helped with creating a sense of a small group targeted her weaknesses

in the genre of academic writing. She argued that “... a knowledgeable person... examines my writings carefully a private teacher helps me when I need it...you know, it was something like a small group. ....”. She continued that the mediation helped her became aware of the important elements of academic writing.

Student 1 believed that collaborative correction led to his gradual independence in academic writing through a number of stages. First, he was empowered in recognizing erroneous sentences and correcting them. He stated that, the self-correction processes in which they were engaged were chances for showing their “linguistic power” and only the explicit forms of mediation showed their real weaknesses. Lee, Ardeshiri and Cummins (2016) believe that the technological forms of instruction which gradually deliver task responsibility to learners create learning environments wherein they make sound decisions on the appropriateness of themselves. Second, the changing nature of mediation from explicit to implicit in each and subsequent sessions showed that he was getting close to the position of a good writer at the graduate level, so that he finally needed little or no mediation which represented his self-regulation.

## **Conclusion**

One of the underlying tenets of DA is that mediation, as the main means of turning learners' inter-psychological knowledge into intra-psychological knowledge, guarantees covering individual and social aspects of their development. Given the growing application of DA principles into online writing courses, this study investigated the realism of online mediation based on the views of the Iranian learners to shed a new light on the effectiveness of online DA.

The findings of the study indicated that authenticity is well-supported in online mediation as it not only provides learners with linguistic models but also targets their quality of interaction, academic identities and acculturation into the target language. Language use authenticity in online mediation involves triggering learners' hidden linguistic knowledge through engaging them in a step by step process of revision and getting correction from the expert who is more knowledgeable in the field. Context authenticity involved negotiation for both meaning and form on the side of learners. Context authenticity of online DA mediation also relies on the slow turn taking process which allows for the deliberate focus on comprehensible input and output. Online mediation leads to the development of new academic identities on the side of learners through helping them understand and mimic the principles of academic writing, promoting their critical thinking and feeling confident in drawing on their linguistic resources (Burton, 2012). The collaborative behavior of the researcher and learners during the program and the changing nature of the dependence of the learner into independent functioning also addressed learners' acculturation into academic writing.

Results of this study support the integration of online mediation into DA writing courses and imply that through using the visual salience of form and contextual mediation instructors can provide learners with a virtual supportive learning environment wherein they contextualize their learning through interactions beyond the time and place limitations. Further research can explore mediation efficacy in relation to the classroom based form of DA or compare mediation of the classroom and online courses. Exploring

the efficacy of mediation in teaching other language skills (e.g., reading, speaking and listening) can also be of beneficence.

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