On Iranian EFL Learners' Affective and Cognitive Perceptions of Web-Based Dynamic Assessment (WDA): Pragmatic Knowledge in Focus

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Abstract

As an area that has emerged due to the integration of technology in education, web-based dynamic assessment (WDA) has evolved in comparison to face-to-face dynamic assessment. Moreover, pragmatic competence, as a central component of EFL learning, is a crucial research area in English Language Teaching (ELT). This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceptions of EFL intermediate learners regarding the impact of WDA on their pragmatic knowledge. The participants in this study consisted of 10 female Iranian intermediate EFL learners enrolled in English courses at a private language institute in Tehran, Iran. They were selected through purposive sampling. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. The results revealed the following perceptions: enhancement of verbal skills, increased willingness to learn pragmatics, reduced learner anxiety, expedited pragmatic learning, heightened learner agency, increased learner motivation, improved learner self-confidence, greater learner autonomy, enhanced enjoyment, and improved mutual relationships among students. These findings have implications for EFL teachers, learners, and curriculum planners.
Key Words: Dynamic Assessment (DA), Pragmatics, Pragmatic Competence, Pragmatic Knowledge, Web-based Dynamic Assessment (WDA)

Introduction

English teaching is characterized by closely intermingled issues, among which instruction and assessment can be named. This interrelationship has caused changes in instruction to contribute to changes in assessment and vice versa (Poehner, 2008). As a significant shift in English language assessment, the introduction of dynamic assessment (DA) can be referred to as an active teaching process assessment of a child's perception, learning, thinking, and problem-solving. The process aims to modify an individual's cognitive functioning and observe subsequent changes in learning and problem-solving patterns within the testing situation (Rahbardar et al., 2014). DA is a framework for

conceptualizing teaching and assessment as an integrated activity of understanding learner abilities by actively supporting their development (Poehner, 2008).

DA, rooted in Vygotsky's (1989) Socio-cultural Theory of Mind (SCT) and his theory of ZPD, revolves around the principle that people's free-standing performance uncovers their past improvement; this is while the goal of most evaluations is the prediction of learners' future performance (Poehner, 2008; Rezai et al., 2022a; 2022b; Rezai et al., 2023). Within this thinking stance, reaching an accurate grasp of the development processes and scaffolding people to deal with learning complexities is not materialized just by observing their sole performance in the present (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). However, what is required is interaction with them to trigger their full scope of abilities and support their development (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). In education, this means that identifying the learners' abilities (assessment) and supporting their development (instruction) should be treated as a dialectically mixed activity. This is named DA (Poehner, 2008).

Furthermore, as an area of the outcome of using technology in education, web-based DA (WDA) has emerged compared to face-to-face DA. WDA refers to any DA operationalized in technology-based educational methods without face-to-face interaction between teachers and students. Accordingly, researchers have used web 2.0 technologies (including wikis, blogs, social networking, podcasting, and content hosting services), Google Wave, Skype, etc. (Besharati & Ahmadi, 2017) to implement WDA.

Moreover, pragmatic competence as a main component of EFL learning is an important research area in English Language Teaching (ELT) (Kasper, 2000). Pragmatic competence comprises learners' socio-cultural and sociolinguistic knowledge (Sadri et al., 2018, p. 21). As Austin (1962) has put it, pragmatic competence plays a key role in communication success. According to Leech (1983), pragmatic competence reduces communication disruption and maintains social balance in interactions. In linguistic theory, it is an important issue relevant to relational communication (Sadri et al., 2018).

With a view to the proven impact of the use of technology on EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge (Alibeigloo et al., 2021), combined with the significant effect of DA on different skills of the English language, investigating learners' perceptions of the impact of WDA on their pragmatic knowledge is worth treating. This necessity is of added importance when it is noticed that there is no exclusive consensus on the effectiveness of technology on language achievement (Moranski & Kim, 2016). Contrary to the popularity of technology use in education in different countries, traditional teaching methods are seemingly applied to teach English pragmatics. A direct outcome of this is that possibly many learners are not familiar with the potential of WDA for pragmatic language learning. To corroborate this, Olyaei et al. (2020) and Alibeigloo et al. (2021) have shown that Iranian EFL learners are less familiar with the advantages of various technological tools for educational purposes.

The existing body of literature on English language teaching reveals a close interconnection between instruction and assessment, with changes in one influencing the other (Ghahderijani et al., 2021; Namaziandost et al., 2024; Poehner, 2008). A notable development in English language assessment is the introduction of dynamic assessment (DA), grounded in Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory of Mind and the Zone of Proximal Development (Poehner, 2008). DA emphasizes the inadequacy of observing learners' present performance to understand their developmental processes, necessitating interaction to unveil their full potential (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). Within the realm of

education, this perspective underscores the dialectical relationship between assessment (identifying learners' abilities) and instruction (supporting their development), termed as DA (Poehner, 2008). Furthermore, integrating technology in education has given rise to web-based dynamic assessment (WDA), characterized by the absence of face-to-face interactions between teachers and students. Employing various Web 2.0 technologies and platforms like wikis, blogs, social networking, and podcasting, WDA represents a technological advancement in educational methodologies (Besharati & Ahmadi, 2017).

Pragmatic competence, recognized as a fundamental aspect of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, encompasses socio-cultural and sociolinguistic knowledge crucial for successful communication (Sadri et al., 2018). Pragmatic competence is integral to effective communication and social balance in interactions (Austin, 1962; Leech, 1983), and it has become a focal point in English Language Teaching (ELT) research.

Considering the proven impact of technology on EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge (Alibeigloo et al., 2021) and the significant effect of DA on various English language skills, there is a need to explore learners' perceptions of the impact of WDA on pragmatic knowledge. This becomes even more crucial given the lack of a unanimous consensus on the effectiveness of technology in language achievement (Moranski & Kim, 2016). Despite the widespread use of technology in education, traditional teaching methods still prevail in the instruction of English pragmatics, potentially leaving many learners unaware of the advantages of WDA. This is supported by evidence showing low familiarity among Iranian EFL learners with various technological tools for educational purposes (Olyaei et al., 2020; Alibeigloo et al., 2021).

Despite some studies on WDA (e.g., Besharati & Ahmadi, 2017; Ebadi & Saeedian, 2016; Fathi et al., 2023a, b; Motallebzadeh & Ghazizadeh, 2016; Tuluk & Yurdugül, 2020; Wang et al., 2021), the literature appears to suffer from a dearth of research on learners' perceptions of the impact of WDA on pragmatic knowledge. In response to this gap, this study aims to address the following research question:

What are EFL intermediate learners' affective and cognitive perceptions of the effect of WDA on their pragmatic knowledge?

Review of the Related Literature

This study is theoretically based on DA. In DA, instruction and feedback occur in the testing process (Allal & Ducrey, 2000). The purpose of DA is to change language behavior and to see what happens in the learning process. Furthermore, DA may improve students' performance on a test by giving them some help during assessment (Allal & Ducrey, 2000).

On the whole, DA originates from two theories: the first is Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, and the second is Feuerestein's structural cognitive modifiability. The former states that social understanding is interrelated with cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). He suggested that higher mental functions stem from our interactions with more capable people. Vygotsky put forward the idea of difference score', which is the difference between a learner's pretest (before intervention) and his post-test (after intervention) scores, or it can be the score on the post-test alone (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002).

Structural cognitive modifiability theory claims that people can modify their cognitive ability, and the mediator should take full responsibility for this (Feuerstein, Falik, & Rand, 2002). The building block of this theory is MLE. In MLE, it is stated that what causes change in individuals is not environmental stimulus but rather the mediation offered by a more capable person (Poehner & Lantolf, 2005). MLE has some assumptions. First, human beings can modify their cognitive abilities; second, cognitive abilities are not impeded from progressing by factors such as age; third, MLE lends itself to cognitive modifiability better than unmediated learning experience (Feuerstein et al., 2002).

Alsmari (2020) investigated the effectiveness of the flipped classroom on Saudi EFL undergraduates' pragmatic competence and language proficiency. The study involved 100 participants, divided into a flipped teaching group (n=50) and a traditional teaching group (n=50). The research tools included the Oxford Placement Test, a discourse completion test, and reflective e-portfolios. The results indicated that the flipped teaching group significantly outperformed the traditional teaching group, highlighting the substantial impact of the flipped classroom on Saudi EFL undergraduates' pragmatic competence and language proficiency. Moreover, Katchamat (2019) sought to examine the effect of the flipped classroom on EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge. Twenty-two English major students participated in the study, employing an experimental design. Data collection utilized a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The findings revealed significant differences in the frequency of use in certain categories of the apology speech act set between the two groups, though the overall frequency did not significantly differ. Additionally, paired sample t-test results for the pretest and post-test indicated that learners taught through flipped classroom instruction exhibited more appropriate and accurate use of English apologies than in the pretest.

In another study, Haghighi et al. (2018) explored the impact of the flipped classroom on EFL learners' appropriate use of refusal. Sixty participants from two Iranian universities were assigned to flipped and conventional groups. The flipped group received course materials via the Telegram app before class, with class time devoted to communicative activities. Various data collection sources, including a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), a study log, teacher's field notes, a Learning Experience Questionnaire (LEQ), a written self-report survey, and a Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) questionnaire, were used. Both parametric and non-parametric statistics were employed for data analysis. The results indicated that the flipped group participants were more engaged with course content, outperforming their counterparts in the conventional group in the post-test. Questionnaire results suggested that participants in the flipped group enjoyed the learning experience and accepted Telegram as a suitable platform for language learning. Furthermore, Motallebzadeh and Ghazizadeh (2016) investigated the impact of electronic-based dynamic assessment (DA) on the listening skills of Iranian EFL learners, revealing a significant positive effect.

In 2016, Ebadi and Saeedian explored learners' development in L2 reading comprehension in novel and increasingly complex situations through web-based DA. The results confirmed the significant impact of increased task complexity on learners' reading comprehension development. Moreover, Alemi (2015) examined the effect of DA on Iranian EFL students' writing self-assessment, including the use of idioms. Results showed improvement in learners' use of idioms, prompting further investigation into the

impact of different DA models on EFL learners' comprehension and production of L2 idioms.

Overall, the reviewed literature highlights the need for more investigations to document the impact of different web-based DA models on Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge.

Method

Research Design

This study benefited from a basic interpretive design within a qualitative paradigm using a semi-structured interview. This type of design provides "descriptive accounts targeted to understanding a phenomenon using data that might be collected in a variety of ways, such as interviews, observations, and document review" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 29).

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 10 female Iranian intermediate EFL learners studying English in one of the private language institutes of Tehran, Iran. They were selected through purposive sampling from a group of learners previously exposed to WDA for learning English pragmatics. Their age range was 19-37. The mother tongue of all of the participants was Persian. To observe ethical issues, the consent of the participants was taken for participation in the study. Moreover, they were ensured anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information.

Instrument

The researcher designed a semi-structured interview to elicit the participants' perceptions of web-based DA. It consisted of four open-ended questions, which the interviewees answered orally through social networks. The interview was run individually. The interview data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim so that the researcher could analyze the content of the interviews more easily. The credibility of the interview was checked through low-inference descriptors, and its dependability was checked through member checking. The language of the interview was Persian. Indeed, the researcher analyzed the data and translated the results into English. To make sure about the accuracy of the translation, back-translation was used.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The data collection for this study started with selecting the sample. Then, the researcher took the interview in the way mentioned above. Next, the audio-recorded data from the interviews was transcribed verbatim for analysis. To analyze the data, the researcher qualitatively analyzed the transcribed interview data through qualitative thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was done in four steps. In the first step, the researcher tried to become familiar with the data by taking notes or looking through the data. In the second step, the data was coded. It involved making some phrases and sentences of the text bold and creating some codes representing the content of the bold parts. The codes were reviewed in the third step to identify their recurrent patterns. The fourth step examined the extracted themes to ensure their accuracy. To observe the credibility of the interview results, the researcher provided direct quotations from interviewees in reporting the content analysis results (i.e., low-inference descriptors). Member checking was used to check the dependability of interview data. The researcher showed some parts of the analyzed interviews to interviewees to see whether their perceptions were the same as the extracted themes.

Results

Interviews were content analyzed, and ten themes were extracted; each is explained and exemplified.

Theme 1: The Enhancement of Verbal Skills

The first prominent theme from the data analysis was "The Enhancement of Verbal Skills." This theme revolves around the notable improvement in participants' verbal abilities as a direct result of their engagement with web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) activities. This theme is supported by quotations from the participants, reinforcing the idea of the positive impact of web-based DA on verbal skills development. For example, Participant 1 articulated this enhancement: "Discussing the reasons why we selected option X or Y was very interesting for me. It stimulated me to talk more freely. I think this made me more pleasant." P1's testimony highlights how engaging in discussions through web-based DA improved their speaking skills and contributed to greater sociability.

Additionally, Participant 3 emphasized the effect of web-based DA on verbal ability: "Web-based DA has caused improvements in my verbal ability. I feel that my verbal skill has improved due to web-based DA." This statement underscores the tangible progress in verbal skills attributed to web-based DA. Furthermore, Participant 5 stressed the role of mediation in enhancing speaking skills, stating, "Web-based DA very influences talking ability. The role of mediation was very important in enhancing talking skills." P5's comment highlights the importance of web-based DA in facilitating improved speaking abilities, with mediation as a significant contributing factor. Participant 8 shared their experience, noting, " I have become a better speaker after being exposed to web-based DA. The teacher asked us to mention our thoughts, and I found this very positive and encouraged me to speak more." P8's statement reinforces the notion that web-based DA encourages active participation and contributes to improved speaking skills.

Theme 2: Enhancing Willingness to Learn Pragmatics

The second salient theme from the analysis is "Enhancing Willingness to Learn Pragmatics." This theme revolves around the transformative effect of web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) on participants' attitudes and motivation toward acquiring proficiency in English pragmatics.

This theme is substantiated by participant quotations, providing insights into their shifted perspectives and heightened enthusiasm for pragmatics learning. For instance, Participant 10 emphasized the role of web-based DA in promoting pragmatics learning, stating, "To me, web-based DA encourages us to learn English pragmatics. It was interesting and exciting for us. It increased my tendency to learn how to mention my request or how to apologize." P10's testimonial underscores web-based DA's captivating and motivating impact on their inclination to understand and utilize pragmatic language skills. Participant 2 also acknowledged the increased eagerness for pragmatics learning, crediting web-based DA: "I am now more eager about pragmatics learning, and this is due to web-based DA. My interest and excitement towards pragmatics have been increased." P2's statement highlights the heightened enthusiasm and interest generated by web-based DA, making the learning of pragmatics more appealing.

Furthermore, Participant 5 discussed a significant shift in attitude towards English pragmatics, explaining, "My attitude concerning English pragmatics has changed very much after using web-based DA. I believe that pragmatics is useless. But now I try to pay more attention to this aspect of language than before." P5's perspective showcases a remarkable transformation from skepticism to active engagement in pragmatics learning, brought about by their web-based DA experiences. Participant 7 echoed this sentiment: "Web-based DA has made me more enthusiastic about pragmatic knowledge. I'm willing to learn how to use English in appropriate contexts." P7's comment reinforces the notion that web-based DA fosters a willingness and an eagerness to acquire proficiency in the pragmatic aspects of English.

Theme 3: Reducing Learner Anxiety

The third significant theme emerged from the data is "Reducing Learner Anxiety." This theme revolves around the role of web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) in alleviating anxiety among learners when using English in practical contexts, particularly in speech acts and pragmatic situations.

This theme is corroborated by direct quotations from the participants, providing valuable insights into how web-based DA positively affects their feelings of anxiety. Participant 2 described a notable reduction in anxiety related to using English for practical purposes, stating, "I was always anxious about situations in which I had to use English for practical aims like apologizing. With the role of web-based DA, my anxiety has decreased. I found such issues more comfortable." P2's testimony highlights how web-based DA contributes to a more comfortable and less anxiety-inducing environment for learners. Participant 4 attested to the relaxing effect of web-based DA on learning speech acts, expressing, "Web-based DA makes me more relaxed in learning speech acts. I am at ease with this method. Traditional tests are boring." P4's perspective underscores the contrast between traditional assessment methods, which can induce stress, and web-based DA, which fosters a relaxed and comfortable learning atmosphere. Participant 7 discussed the impact of stress on learning speed and how web-based DA mitigated it, stating, Stress has weakened my learning speed. When my teacher familiarized me with web-based DA, I am less stressed. I can cope with my anxiety in learning pragmatic issues utilizing web-based DA." P7's perspective highlights how web-based DA serves as a stress-relieving mechanism, enabling learners to manage better anxiety associated with pragmatic learning. Participant 3 emphasized the effectiveness of web-based DA in anxiety control, attributing it to the teacher's friendly guidance and support: "Web-based DA is effective in anxiety control. The teacher behaves in a friendly manner, guides students, and helps them. All these play a role in decreasing anxiety and making the mind calm." P3's statement underscores the importance of a supportive and encouraging environment facilitated by web-based DA in reducing learner anxiety.

Theme 4: Making Pragmatic Learning Quicker

The fourth recurring theme, "Making Pragmatic Learning Quicker," highlights the efficiency and accelerated pace of learning experienced by participants through web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) in the context of pragmatic language acquisition.

Participant 1 noted the remarkable speed at which they could grasp pragmatics when utilizing web-based DA, expressing, "Learning pragmatics is expedited when the web-based DA method is employed. It appears to me that I can absorb information more rapidly within the web-based DA classroom." Participant 9 echoed this sentiment, indicating that web-based DA made learning pragmatics smoother and required less effort than traditional teaching methods: "I find that I grasp pragmatics more effectively through web-based DA instruction. It demands less exertion to understand pragmatics via web-based DA, especially in contrast to traditional classroom approaches." Participant 6 highlighted the specific aspect of quicker acquisition of practical language skills such as making requests, offering apologies, and delivering refusals through web-based DA: "Web-based DA contributes to an expedited learning process for using requests, apologies, and refusals. When web-based DA is implemented, the acquisition of these communication skills occurs more rapidly." Participant 10 underlined the active nature of pragmatic learning facilitated by web-based DA, suggesting that it enhances engagement and reduces the time needed to acquire proficiency: "Web-based DA injects dynamism into pragmatic learning. It necessitates less time, possibly because it stimulates the brain. Consequently, the learning process becomes more time-efficient."

This theme collectively emphasizes the effectiveness of web-based DA in streamlining the learning of pragmatics, reducing the time required for mastery, and promoting active engagement among learners.

Theme 5: Increasing Learner Agency

The fifth recurring theme, "Increasing Learner Agency," emphasizes the shift towards a more student-centered and autonomous learning experience when utilizing web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) in the context of pragmatics learning.

Participant 5 highlighted learners' greater degree of control over their learning in the web-based DA approach, emphasizing that the teacher is not the sole authority in the classroom: "We have more control over our learning in the web-based DA approach. That is to say, the teacher is not the most important person in the class when web-based DA is implemented. We should actively engage in learning pragmatics." Participant 7 stressed the increased responsibility placed on students in web-based DA settings involving activities such as verbalization, critical thinking, and discussion: "The burden of learning rests more on students' shoulders than on teachers in web-based DA. It demands active verbal expression, thoughtful consideration, and collaborative student discussions. Consequently, students are required to be more actively engaged in the learning process." Participant 3 described the dominant role of students in web-based DA, emphasizing that learners are tasked with various responsibilities, including thinking aloud, responding to the teacher's guidance, and actively participating in discussions: "The role of students takes on a more dominant position in this method. We are expected to perform various tasks, such as articulating our thoughts, responding to the teacher's guidance and hints, and maintaining a high level of engagement in the web-based DA method." Participant 4 highlighted the increased student participation and activity observed in DA-based learning compared to traditional classroom settings, where students were often more passive: "Student participation increases significantly when DA is used. In traditional

classes, I was not as active, as the teacher directed most activities, and our role was primarily to respond to the teacher's questions. However, DA-based instruction made me much more engaged and active in learning."

This theme collectively underscores the transformative effect of web-based DA in promoting learner agency, shifting the focus towards students as active participants and decision-makers in their learning journey, and fostering a sense of autonomy and responsibility among learners.

Theme 6: Increasing Learners' Motivation
The sixth recurring theme, "Increasing Learners' Motivation," underscores the transformative impact of web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) on learners' motivation to engage in and excel in the learning of pragmatics.

Participant 1 shared how the web-based form of DA rekindled their motivation for pragmatics learning, noting a sense of fatigue with traditional methods: "By using DA in its web-based form, I found myself more motivated to learn pragmatics. I had grown weary of the traditional approach to learning English pragmatics." Participant 10 linked the increase in students' motivation for pragmatics learning to the DA method, contrasting it with the demotivating aspects of old teaching methods: "Students' motivation to learn pragmatics is invigorated by DA-based learning. Old methods have been reiterated for years, offering nothing new. Through these old methods, pragmatics learning becomes demotivating." Participant 6 acknowledged the significance of motivation in the context of pragmatics, expressing how web-based DA ignited their motivation to learn and their belief in their ability to master pragmatics: Motivation serves as a significant catalyst in learning pragmatics. This subject has been challenging for me. My motivation to learn surged when I participated in web-based classes with the DA method. I feel more confident in my ability to grasp pragmatics." Participant 7 attested to the motivating influence of web-based DA, particularly in the areas of apology and request, where they felt more energized and recognized the high applicability of pragmatics in using the English language: "Web-based DA had a profound impact on motivating me to learn about apology and request. I became more enthusiastic in my learning journey. I realized that pragmatics has a practical and valuable role in using the English language."

This theme collectively emphasizes the power of web-based DA to reignite learners' enthusiasm and motivation for pragmatics learning, offering a fresh and engaging approach that counters the demotivating effects of traditional methods and instills a renewed sense of purpose and excitement among learners.

Theme 7: Enhancing Learners' Self-Confidence
The seventh recurrent theme, "Enhancing Learners' Self-Confidence," emphasizes the transformative effect of web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) on learners' self-assurance and belief in their ability to excel in learning English pragmatics.

Participant 10 described a boost in self-confidence when web-based DA was employed, expressing a belief in their capability to master English pragmatics in web-based and DA-based classroom settings: "I have greater confidence in my ability when web-based DA is used. I can learn English pragmatics when classes are conducted in a

web-based and DA-based format." Participant 2 noted an increase in self-confidence attributed to their active participation in DA-based English classes, suggesting that their engagement contributed to this newfound self-assurance: "I engage in English classes with the DA method with greater self-confidence. This might be attributed to the fact that I have a more active role in the DA classroom." Participant 8 echoed a similar sentiment, mentioning heightened confidence in their abilities within web-based DA environments, feeling that they possessed the competence to excel in English pragmatics under these conditions: "I have greater confidence in my ability when web-based DA is used. I sense that I can learn English pragmatics when classes are web-based and DA-based." Participant 5 expressed a sense of increased strength and self-belief attributed to the web-based DA approach, particularly after becoming familiar with it: "I believe that I have discovered a newfound strength to learn pragmatics through the web-based DA approach. I strongly believe in myself after becoming acquainted with web-based DA."

Theme 8: Increasing Learners' Autonomy

The eighth recurring theme, "Increasing Learners' Autonomy," underscores the transformation of learners into more independent, self-directed individuals within web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) instruction.

Participant 4 expressed an enhanced sense of independence when engaging in web-based classes, particularly in taking control of materials and preparation, contributing to their increased autonomy: "I feel more independent in classes where the web-based method is used. Taking control of materials makes me better prepared and more self-reliant." Participant 8 shared that web-based DA gave them a taste of autonomy, allowing for more independent learning, especially when dynamic instruction was employed: "Web-based DA imparts a sense of autonomy. I can engage in more independent learning when dynamic instruction is employed." Participant 6 described how the web-based DA approach instilled a sense of power and autonomy within them, leading to a heightened perception of independence when being instructed using the DA method: "The web-based DA approach conveys a sense of autonomy. I feel more autonomous when being instructed with the DA approach." Participant 9 noted that one of the characteristics of web-based DA is its enhancement of independence, resulting in reduced dependence on the teacher. They emphasized the importance of self-directed learning, closely tied to autonomy: "A notable characteristic of web-based DA is the enhancement of independence. It leads to reduced reliance on the teacher. We are encouraged to try and learn our way, which is closely linked to self-directed learning."

Theme 9: Increasing Enjoyment

The ninth recurring theme, "Increasing Enjoyment," highlights the positive impact of web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) on the enjoyment and engagement levels of learners during the process of pragmatics learning. Participant 2 expressed a heightened sense of enjoyment associated with the web-based DA approach, describing pragmatic learning as less boring and more enjoyable when using this teaching method: "I experience more enjoyment with the web-based DA approach. Pragmatic learning becomes less monotonous with this teaching method, and I enjoy the learning process

more." Participant 9 conveyed their preference for web-based DA due to its enjoyable and interesting activities, emphasizing the high level of enjoyment they experience while learning English with this approach: "I am fond of web-based DA because its activities are more enjoyable and interesting. There is a high level of enjoyment in learning English through web-based DA." Participant 1 characterized the web-based DA method as exciting and innovative, noting the novelty of the approach and their enjoyment of learning pragmatics through this method: "I found the web-based DA method to be exciting and interesting. I had not experienced such a method before. It is genuinely new and innovative, and I enjoy learning pragmatics through this method." Participant 5 expressed their liking for web-based DA because it provides enjoyment, particularly through discussions of their thoughts, opinions, and reasons. They also found enjoyment in the scaffolding provided by the teacher, viewing it as a positive experience: "I appreciate web-based DA because it brings me enjoyment. I enjoy discussing my thoughts, opinions, and the reasoning behind them. I derive enjoyment from the supportive guidance I receive from the teacher. Overall, it is a rewarding experience for me."

Theme 10: Enhancing Mutual Relationships Between Students

The tenth recurring theme, "Enhancing Mutual Relationships Between Students," highlights how web-based Discourse Analysis (DA) fosters stronger connections and interactions among learners, promoting a collaborative learning environment.

Participant 7 noted that web-based methods provide students with the opportunity to share knowledge and engage in activities with their classmates, facilitating increased interaction among students in web-based teaching: "In the web-based method, students have the chance to exchange knowledge and participate in activities with their peers, leading to enhanced interactions among students in web-based instruction." Participant 3 emphasized the importance of students being in contact with each other and learning from each other's experiences in web-based DA classes, highlighting how mutual learning and sharing of insights contribute to a collaborative environment: "Web-based DA classes are structured in a way that encourages students to connect and learn from their peers' experiences. I derive valuable insights from my friends' hints and contributions." Participant 6 discussed the inherent need for students to be interconnected in the web-based DA method, where collaboration, mutual assistance, and group discussions are encouraged to reach the correct answers, fostering a relationship among learners: "In the web-based DA method, we must be connected. We are taught to support one another, engage in discussions, and collaborate to arrive at the correct answers. This promotes a sense of mutual relationship among us." Participant 4 highlighted the role of web-based DA in nurturing classroom relationships, emphasizing that communication within the classroom is central to implementing web-based DA. Group work is a notable instance of classroom communication emphasized in this approach, further enhancing mutual relationships among students: "A distinctive feature of web-based DA techniques is their capacity to promote classroom relationships. Communication within the classroom is integral to the implementation of web-based DA. Group work, in particular, is an example

of classroom communication that is strongly emphasized, contributing to developing mutual relationships among students."

Discussion

This study addressed the research question regarding EFL intermediate learners' perceptions of the impact of web-based dynamic assessment (WDA) on their pragmatic knowledge. Thematic analysis of the data revealed a series of interconnected themes that shed light on the multifaceted effects of WDA on learners. These themes include enhancing verbal skills, increased willingness to learn pragmatics, reduced learner anxiety, accelerated pragmatic learning, heightened learner agency, boosted motivation, enhanced self-confidence, greater learner autonomy, increased enjoyment, and improved mutual relationships among students.

These findings align with prior research in the field, highlighting the positive impact of dynamic assessment on EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge. Studies by Fani and Rashtchi (2015), Hessamy and Ghaderi (2014), Jarrahzade and Tabatabaei (2014), Mohammadimoghadam (2015), Naeini (2015), and Tajeddin and Tayebipour (2012) reported similar perceptions among EFL learners regarding the benefits of dynamic assessment for learning pragmatics.

The observed reductions in learner anxiety and increases in learner agency, self-confidence, and autonomy can be attributed to the scaffolding and hints provided to learners during the WDA process. Mediated learning experiences play a crucial role in helping learners solve problems through mediation and dialogues, ultimately granting them more control over language use (Feuerstein, 2000). Moreover, the co-construction of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) leads to fundamental shifts in learners' conceptions of learning and their grasp of ideas (Walqui, 2006). These shifts result in enhanced willingness to learn, motivation, and learning pace after exposure to WDA.

Furthermore, the study aligns with the notion that mediated learning experiences, such as those facilitated by WDA, can foster mutual relationships among students (Isman & Tzuriel, 2008). WDA enables learners to directly engage with learning situations formally and informally (Isman & Tzuriel, 2008; Poehner, 2009). This heightened involvement in learning enhances motivation, reduces anxiety, and increases willingness to learn and enjoy the learning experience.

In summary, this study underscores the multifaceted benefits of WDA in the context of EFL pragmatics learning. Beyond enhancing pragmatic skills, WDA contributes to reduced learner anxiety, increased autonomy and self-confidence, heightened motivation, and more enjoyable and collaborative learning experiences. These findings provide valuable insights for educators and practitioners seeking effective approaches to enhance EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge and language acquisition.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that using WDA can be beneficial for improving. This study provides valuable insights into the impact of web-based dynamic assessment (WDA) on EFL learners' verbal skills and various aspects of their learning

experiences. The findings suggest that WDA plays a significant role in enhancing EFL learners' verbal proficiency. Specifically, it is evident that exposure to WDA positively contributes to the development of EFL learners' verbal skills. Through interactive online assessment activities and dynamic feedback, WDA creates an environment conducive to improving learners' verbal expression.

Furthermore, this study highlights the positive effects of WDA on learners' motivation and learning pace. EFL learners exposed to WDA demonstrate an increased eagerness to learn and an accelerated learning pace. The interactive nature of WDA, coupled with its immediate feedback, fosters a sense of enthusiasm and engagement among learners. This heightened motivation, in turn, contributes to a more effective and efficient learning process.

Another crucial finding of this study is the role of WDA in reducing learner anxiety. Anxiety is a significant obstacle to effective language learning, and WDA appears to mitigate this obstacle. Learners reported feeling more relaxed and at ease with the WDA approach. The supportive and interactive nature of WDA helps alleviate anxiety, allowing learners to focus more on the learning process and less on apprehension. Additionally, this study suggests that WDA positively impacts various affective traits of EFL learners. Learners exposed to WDA exhibit increased autonomy in their learning, a higher level of motivation, and a greater sense of agency. These affective traits are essential for self-directed and successful language learning. WDA facilitates an environment where learners take more control over their learning, leading to a sense of ownership and empowerment.

Moreover, WDA contributes to the enjoyment of the learning process and enhances mutual interaction among students. Learners reported finding the WDA approach enjoyable and engaging. They appreciated the opportunities for collaborative learning and mutual support provided by WDA. This sense of enjoyment and interaction makes learning more fulfilling and strengthens the sense of community among learners.

Pedagogically, these findings suggest that EFL teachers can effectively incorporate WDA into their teaching strategies to enhance students' verbal skills. Furthermore, WDA can reduce learner anxiety, boost motivation, encourage agency, and create an enjoyable and interactive learning environment. EFL curriculum developers can draw upon these insights to integrate WDA into future curricula, enriching the learning experiences of EFL learners.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Future research endeavors can build upon these findings by replicating the study with a larger and more diverse sample. Additionally, triangulating data sources through reflective journals and open-ended questionnaires can enhance the credibility of the findings. Exploring the potential influence of gender or language proficiency on EFL learners' perceptions of WDA represents another promising avenue for future research, contributing to a deeper understanding of this dynamic educational approach.

Ethical Approval

The authors declare that all authors filled in the consent form and willingly participated in the study. The ethical committee of Islamic Azad University confirmed that this study

was conducted based on the guidelines and principles of this institute. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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