| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Mediation Through Dynamic Assessment: Facilitating EFL Learners' Self-efficacy in Speaking Skills

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| **ABSTRACT**

Though we cannot deny the importance of testing learners' proficiency to determine their successful intake, the traditional forms of assessment often hinder their linguistic and cognitive development. In the context of Bangladesh, where English is considered a foreign language, it can be noticed that it is their inability to speak in English that the tertiary-level students experience the most difficulties with at universities following English medium instructions. Their situation worsens when they are evaluated traditionally for their spoken performances in their university language courses. That is why dynamic assessment can be an alternative to traditional assessment for evaluating learners' speaking skills. It is closely associated with Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. It believes that the proximity to written or spoken competence cannot be achieved by learners on their own. Therefore, mediation and zone of proximal development play crucial roles in establishing and extending the scope for learners to communicate with others. The interactionist approach of dynamic assessment benefits students in improving their speaking skills in many contexts because of its dialogic and mediated process. Thus, with the help of qualitative data analysis, this paper examines how consequential dynamic assessment will be in evaluating speaking skills at the tertiary level.

1. Introduction:

1.1 Introduction:

Being an indispensable part of language teaching and learning, the importance of assessment cannot be denied. However, the form of assessment, traditional or alternative, can have a crucial impact on language learners. Dynamic assessment (henceforth DA) can be considered an alternative assessment that follows a process-oriented approach, making learners more responsible and self-aware of their learning process. Moreover, this assessment incorporates interactive strategies between teachers and learners that encapsulate the distance between what learners can achieve on their own with their existing knowledge and what they are capable of doing with the potential knowledge received from more competent people (Safdari and Fathi, 2020). The dialogic procedure of assessment in DA that can bridge the gap between learners' current and target knowledge with the help of a more capable person is the key to Vygotsky's Zone of proximal development (henceforth ZPD).

As pointed out by Smith (2018), by denying the passive roles played by the assessor during the testing process only as an invigilator, DA exerts an active role in the assessor during the testing process. It could be as the facilitator, mediator, or assessor through an intervention followed by reassessment. Thus, DA integrates teaching and assessment at the same time, so the time spent by teachers on testing is also time spent by their learners. Considering these inevitable simultaneous interactions between learners and assessors in the process of DA, Elliot (2003) noted that Vygotsky is the theoretical forefather of DA whose notion of

ZPD is a key construct in DA. These very notions of interaction, intervention, and/or mediation implemented by DA make a significant distinction between dynamic assessments and the so-called traditional assessment. Haywood and Lidz (2007) have discussed that mediation is a technique used by good teachers and parents because it ensures the promotion of advanced cognitive abilities among children and learners because of its interactive approach. Moreover, mediation works as a guide to make instructional decisions following Vygotsky's ideas regarding the nature of instructions provided by assessors within ZPD.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, DA is considered the most ideal type of assessment for evaluating the speaking skills of ESL/EFL learners. As DA creates a more relaxed and less rigid environment for the assesses, it helps them overcome the fear of being assessed for the oral communication skills they have the most inhibition with. It is especially more beneficial for the tertiary level intermediate or pre-intermediate level of ESL/EFL learners who have not had adequate opportunities or exposure to the spoken form of English (Safdari and Fathi, 2020). The study of Ebadi and Asakereh (2017) yielded positive results, showing that DA had an outstanding impact on developing the participants' cognition and sense of self-regulation. In addition, Ebrahimi's study in 2015 revealed that though DA did not have a considerable effect on the improvement of fluency, it enhanced participants' accuracy, complexity, and proficiency in speaking. Therefore, this current study undertook the initiatives to explore whether or not DA that is quite frequently coupled with ZDP and mediation can have a consequential impact on learners assisting their self-awareness by correctly analyzing the feedback provided to them. Though there are several limitations including the class size, students' perceptions, students' background, teachers' willingness and so on in the Bangladeshi tertiary-level context, this paper inquired to what extent, DA is implemented in the language assessment and if the teachers as well as learners are ready to embrace it by going against the "erudite" practice of traditional assessment.

1.2 Research Questions:
a) To what extent, do the notions of Vygotsky's ZPD and mediated learning assist Bangladeshi tertiary-level learners in improving their speaking skills?
b) How can dynamic assessment have consequential effects on university-level students who receive and process feedback on speaking skills?

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Assessment in language learning/teaching:

Assessment is an indispensable part of teaching; undoubtedly, EFL programs are no exception. However, there has been a longstanding debate on the terms (e.g. test, examination, evaluation, assessment etc.) that should be used to measure students' performance (Daneshfar and Moharami, 2018). Besides, the forms, strategies, and objectives also differ from one type of assessment to another. For example, testing is a formal and standardized form in which students' performance is measured based on the extent to which they have excelled in a time-specific evaluation process.

On the contrary, assessment is a process to collect information regarding students' current level of competence as well as their ability to improve their capacity in future (Dikli, 2003). According to Daneshfar and Moharami (2018), "An aim of language assessment is to find out how much the process of education improves learners' knowledge of the target language" (p.600).

2.2 Sociocultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development:

The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky is the pioneer of the sociocultural theory (SCT hereafter), and the ZPD is one of the most crucial components of this theory. The theory puts its emphasis on how children's social environment can present them with proper exposure to every social, cultural, and interpersonal experience. As children are not born with social-cultural knowledge, they should be taught the norms and practices with the help of social interactions which in turn assists them with their cognitive development (Daneshfar and Moharami, 2018; Alshammari, 2022). According to SCT, teaching is the process of helping learners hone their cognitive functions, and it is done through the process of mediation. Mediation makes learners surpass their current proficiency level and stimulates further cognitive as well as linguistic development. Thus, in teaching and learning ESL, mediation can be done by a teacher or peer who is more competent in the target language than the learner (Poehner, 2007).

The performative aspect of ZPD is most often highlighted by researchers and educators. In this view, the ZPD represents the differences that can be noticed in learners' performance on a given task based on what a learner can do working alone and what that same learner can do when working in collaboration with a more-capable person. This cognitive focus indicates that solo and unassisted performance is profoundly inadequate. Besides differences in the performance of a learner, there is an interactive aspect to the ZPD as well. In this view, the ZPD is also a space of potential growth through interaction with an expert collaborator. Without actively getting engaged in such interaction, a learner's ZPD for any given task may remain nascent (Verity, 2005).

2.3 Zone of Proximal Development, Mediation, and Dynamic Assessment:

Mediation has a close association with ZPD. In Vygotsky's words, ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It is because Vygotsky argued in this SCT that humans' cognitive development is a mediated process that is done with the help of cultural artifacts, concepts, and tasks. However, the stimuli received from the environment cannot play any role on their own; these become effective for learning when they are filtered through a peer whose linguistic capacity is more advanced than the learner, so it is the mediator who causes the improvement to the child (Daneshfar and Moharami, 2018).

Furthermore, also in dynamic assessment (DA hereafter) like ZPD, mediation is a crucial aspect. As in a learning environment, a learner cannot learn only by receiving exposure to the learning materials unless it is adjusted by a teacher who acts as a human mediator. Even Kozulin (2003) also shared the same view stating that the human form of mediation is the most consequential one for its pedagogical impact. Besides, Lantolf and Poehner opined that in DA, a specific form of mediated support is implemented for the learners, and this is the component that decides whether this assessment will be considered dynamic or static. Therefore, it is not only the tool or material itself, but the mediation added to the process of assessment that works as the determination factor.

2.4 Theoretical Background of Dynamic Assessment:

DA is a form of assessment where the assessment and learning take place together which in turn makes it a process-oriented approach. According to Kazemi, Bagheri and Rassaei, "DA is a process-concerned, future-oriented, interactive, and ZPD-sensitive instruction" (as cited in Alshammari, 2022, p.3938). DA determines the nature of intervention that may help learners improve their performances. The role of the instructor differs here from the traditional assessment in terms of offering proper mediation which goes in accordance with the development of new learning as well as thinking capacities. One of the most significant aspects of implementing DA in teaching is that it enables learners to change their learning strategies by presenting them with a transition from assessing their fixed cognitive abilities measured through traditional assessment tools to a more diverse instruction-based assessment that has a better understanding of their abilities. Therefore, it can be said that DA opts for an individualized process-oriented approach rather than a one-size-fits-all product-oriented approach (Haywood and Lidz, 2007; Alshammari, 2022). As Vygotsky put it in his seminal work (1978) that we "need to concentrate not on the product of development but on the very process by which higher forms are established" (p.64).

Later, Reuven Feuerstein, a clinical, developmental, and cognitive psychologist introduced his theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) that expanded Vygotsky's notion of SCT and ZPD. He described it as a process of interaction between an experienced adult and a "developing human organism" where the previous one assists the latter by putting him/herself between the learner and external sources of stimulation and "mediates" the world by processing it in such a way so that the learner can produce appropriate learning behaviour that he/she may not be able to do on his/her own (Feuerstein et. al., 1979, p.71). Thus, it can be said that what distinguishes DA from traditional assessments is DA provides information about learners' capabilities to hone their skills when they receive proper interventions from someone who is linguistically more advanced than the learners, whereas traditional ones focus only on the existing skills of learners (Alshammari, 2022).

Using DA in daily teaching practice requires understanding two main aspects: the overall goal of DA and the essential techniques used to reach that goal (Feuerstein et al., 1979; Lidz, 1991). Setting clear goals for the DA assists instructors in recognizing and documenting the varying degrees of differences between learners' use of their current cognitive strengths and providing them with the appropriate intervention to enhance their use of the inefficient skills that they possess at present in order to maximize success.

2.5 Interactionist DA vs Interventionist DA:

Interactionist DA is based on a dialogic process, and it incorporates both assessment and instruction. This model is based on a qualitative interpretation of Vygotsky's ZPD, which focuses on helping learners perform what they cannot do independently and develop their abilities with the help of assistance and interactions with the mediator. There are no pre-designed cues, questions, hints or help. Here in this type of DA, the mediation is derived from the collaborative interaction between the teacher and learners in the form of dialogues (mediated) in which the teacher responds to the examinee's needs while changing the mediation continually according to learners' needs to achieve the proper procedure (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011).

Furthermore, interactionist DA is interpretative in nature, and it abandons the examinee-examiner relationship in favor of a tutor-student relationship in assessment by following a dialogic communication between the student and the teacher. In fact, it goes along with Vygotsky's preference for cooperative dialoguing in assessment (Poehner, 2005). According to Lantolf and Poehner (2011), "Interactionist DA, on the other hand, places no restrictions on mediation but instead demands that the mediator do everything possible to help the learner stretch beyond his/her current independent performance, short of giving the answer, although even this might promote development if it occurs at a propitious point in the interaction" (p.15).

On the contrary, in the interventionist DA, the tasks and hints are developed to predict the learners' difficulties they may encounter during the assessment. In this approach, mediation is pre-arranged in the form of implicit to explicit types such as hints, prompts, and leading questions. The mediator follows the process precisely leading the learner from hint to hint (clues) and supports the learner to choose the correct answer (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). According to Poehner (2008), mediation in the interventionist DA is implemented by the teacher's command and ends with an accurate response from the learners. Mediation is arranged in a continuum of most implicit to most explicit, and during DA, the mediator follows the scale precisely, "moving from hint to hint until the learner either responds correctly or until the final hint is reached and the solution is revealed and explained" (Lantolf and Poehner, 2011, p.15).

Again, the interventionist approach can be of two types, sandwich format and cake format. In the sandwich format, there are three stages: pretest, mediation (instruction) and posttest. The pretest is first administered to the applicants; then, the mediation phase is applied as instruction activities (that is pre-designed based on learners' requirements according to the answers provided to the pretest); and finally, the same pretest is applied to get the information as the posttest. As the mediation takes place between the two pretest and posttest phases, it is termed as sandwiched instruction. On the contrary, in the other format, learners are presented with a series of items. They receive the next question if they give a proper answer to the previous one. Through the process, support is presented immediately when difficulties are met, like layers of icing on a cake (Daneshfar and Moharami, 2018).

2.6 Dynamic Assessment and Speaking Skills:

There have been relatively fewer researches on the application of dynamic assessment to evaluate speaking skills than any other skills. Even though in ESL and/or EFL programs, speaking seems the most challenging skill to the learners, traditional assessment strategies are implemented most of the time, even at the tertiary level. What makes it worse is these students also do not receive enough exposure to the use of English in speaking during their school days. Fahmi, Pratolo, and Zahruni (2020) mention in their article that Indonesian students cannot speak proper English when they reach seventeen years old and have been learning the language for over six years. Moreover, more shockingly, the students from the third or fourth semester of a university still find it difficult to communicate in English. Their fear of speaking multiples when they are assessed traditionally because it makes them feel less confident and their inhibition becomes stronger. As a result, the researchers implemented dynamic assessment in evaluating their students' speaking skills, and this dialogic assessment with the help of mediation has yielded positive outcomes (p.778-779).

In another study, Limmerstedt found that dynamic assessment played a significant role in improving South African students' narratives. Noticeable changes were observed in students' production of narratives before and after the application of DA. A similar study conducted by Cowell in 2009 put students in two different groups of controlled and experimental groups to find out whether DA intervention can develop their storytelling abilities. After receiving exposure to the mediation, the researcher noticed "a highly significant improvement" in the intervention group's storytelling capability. As a result, it has been concluded that a mediated teaching approach helps increase the confidence level among students (as cited in Alshammari, 2033, p.3941).

In addition to that, DA mediation following the principles of ZPD has proved to have a consequential impact on the development of speaking skills of bilingual beginners and advanced-level learners by ensuring self-satisfaction as well as self-regulation. Therefore, it can be said that DA, ZPD, and mediation not only assist learners with their speaking skills but also with their motivation, cognitive development, self-assessment and so on. For example, Siwathaworn and Wudthayagorn (2018) investigated the impact of DA on Thai EFL undergraduate students. The analysis of their quantitative data shows that the test design based on DA encouraged students to overcome their shyness and fear of speaking and instill a more optimistic view of their speaking ability.

3. Research Methodology:

3.1 Research instruments:

For the qualitative research method, the researcher used focus group discussion (FGD) to collect data. The reason behind choosing qualitative data analysis is qualitative research interviews appreciate the world from the perception of participants and explore the necessity of their experiences (Kvale, 1996). Moreover, for the research purpose of this paper, it was important to get participants' responses in as detail as possible.

3.1.1 FGD of students:

FGD is one of the most widely used research instruments for collecting qualitative data. To receive in-detail research-relevant information, FGD is quite effective. Moreover, it also helps researchers to have a holistic analysis of the research data (Dilshad and Latif, 2013). According to Denscombe, "focus group consists of a small group of people, usually between six and nine

in number, who are brought together by a trained moderator (the researcher) to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic" (2007, p.115).

3.2 Research participants:

This research paper's principal focus is to investigate how much tertiary-level Bangladeshi students can benefit from the implementation of a mediated learning process in assistance with ZPD and dynamic assessment for their speaking skills. There have not been a lot of studies that try to find out what students think; how they feel; or what they want from their course instructors to hone their most feared skill, which is their oral communication skills. The teachers are trained and ready to embrace the notion that traditional assessment cannot pave their learners' way to success and self-awareness anymore. However, are the learners ready? They have been chosen as the sole participants for this research endeavour to learn about learners' perspectives, needs, lacks, and necessities.

3.2.1 The students:

For this research's FGD, seven students were chosen with random sampling. All of them completed a spoken course titled "Improving Oral Communication Skills" in their first semester. It is a compulsory language course for the students of the university. As mentioned earlier, the students were from the Bangla medium, so they did not have any exposure and/or practice of interacting in English in their twelve years of school and college life (classes 11 and 12 are considered college in the Bangla medium and English version in the Bangladeshi education system).

They were briefed about their role in the FGD. The researcher ensured that the students were comfortable enough to share their real thoughts and ideas about their experience of practising speaking in English, and how they got accustomed to the university environment where English is the medium of instruction. As a result, they freely talked about their experience, challenges, and strategies regarding the use of English in their speaking.

3.3 FGD questions:

The following questions were discussed in the FGD:

a) How often do you practice speaking in English outside of the classroom?
b) Who are you more comfortable with practicing communicating in English?
c) Who do you think can give you effective feedback and/or help you improve your speaking in English, and how?
d) What makes it difficult for you to participate in the class discussion in English?
e) During your English-speaking course in the first semester, how did you receive feedback/corrections from your course instructor?
f) Was the process of receiving feedback/correction helpful? If yes, how? If not, why?

4. Results and Discussion:

4.1 FGD findings:

Question a) How often do you practice speaking in English outside of the classroom?

Out of seven, only one student said that she practices speaking in English outside of the classroom on a regular basis. She added that when she spends time with her friends at the cafeteria or on the ground, she sometimes communicates in English. However, there are only a few friends with whom she can do it because others are usually disinterested or find it ridiculous to speak in English among themselves. On the contrary, the rest of the six students mentioned that they hardly use English on campus when they are not in the classroom.

All of them agreed that they used to practice speaking in English outside of the classroom when they were doing the speaking course in their first semester. The reason they shared is they were constantly reminded and motivated by the course instructor to use English as much as possible, and it was mandatory to use English in the class. However, for other courses, there are no strict requirements for using English in classroom discussion and participation. As one of them mentioned, "For our departmental courses, using English is not mandatory. Teachers give lectures in English, but for class discussion, Bangla is allowed." As using L1 while interacting with the course instructor is permissible, they are not under any pressure to interact and/or improve their English.

Question b) Who are you more comfortable with practicing communicating in English?

Four out of seven students shared that they are more comfortable practicing English with their family members/siblings, and three other students mentioned that they find it more comfortable to practice with their classmates/friends. According to the former group of students, as they are closer to their siblings/family members, they can practice with them more easily, and they also feel less shy when they make any mistakes. Even when their mistakes are corrected by their own people, they do not take it personally. Moreover, they can practice with their family members whenever they want, so it is more convenient for them. "There is no boundary or formality within our family. That is why it is more comfortable. I know that they are not judging me."-shared by one of the participants.

However, the latter group of students think that it is their friends that they are more comfortable with because they share the same level of proficiency. Furthermore, their friends and seniors know which mistakes need to be corrected in the academic settings. If they need to rehearse their presentation, they can do it in front of their peers and seniors and receive helpful feedback from them. More importantly, when they practice it with their classmates, it is more effective, according to them. Their classmates know the course instructor's requirements better, so they can advise them properly keeping those criteria in mind. One participant opined, "Our classmates or friends know what exactly the teacher wants from us. They know it better for which we can get better marks or for which our marks can be deducted.".

Question c) Who do you think can give you effective feedback and/or help you improve your speaking in English, and how?

Most of the students answered this question while sharing their thoughts on the previous question. The students who are comfortable with their family members have different perspectives on this issue. For example, a student whose elder sister is a university graduate helps him with various aspects of speaking in English, such as correct pronunciation, use of formal English, use of positive body language and eye contact etc. Besides, another student who has a younger sister studying in an English medium school helps her with vocabulary and pronunciation. According to her, as her sister is from an English medium, she knows a wide range of synonyms and names of different fruits, birds, and flowers which are uncommon or unknown to the student. According to her, "Even though she is younger than me, my sister knows a lot of words and their meaning and pronunciation than me because she has been studying in English medium school. But, I'm from Bangla medium, so my vocabulary is really limited." Also, the student whose brother is a corporate employee helps him with his presentations. For instance, how to make proper PowerPoint slides, how to give an interactive presentation, how to handle the question/answer session, how to correct himself when he makes any mistake during the presentation etc.

In contrast, the students supporting peer practice think that their classmates, friends, and university seniors can provide them with effective feedback to improve their spoken English by having a more meaningful conversation. In their opinion, it is more effective because, from their class discussion/participation, and club activities/meetings, those people are aware of the limitations that the students have. Also, they have said that as they spend most of their time on campus surrounded by their peers and seniors and interact with them for various reasons either in L1 or L2, they can observe them more closely. One of the students shared his experience of how his engagements in club activities helped him overcome the influence of his regional accent on his pronunciation. According to him, he had problems pronouncing the sounds /p/ and /ch/ properly. When his seniors in the club he joined noticed it, they helped him with the correct pronunciation, and though they corrected it in his L1, it also helped him in his L2 with words that start with those sounds. According to him, "My seniors tried to correct my pronunciation because for club matters, we have to interact with administrative people, faculty members, sponsors etc. So, they initially corrected those sounds in Bangla which eventually helped me in English too."

Question d) What makes it difficult for you to participate in the class discussion in English?

All seven of the students said that it is their lack of fluency that makes it difficult for them to participate in the class discussion. After fluency, for five students, it is their lack of vocabulary that creates challenges for them in their class performance. Again, for the other two students, it is their pronunciation problem which inhibits their class participation. While talking about the issue of their fluency, they said that as they lack fluency in speaking, it takes a lot of time for them to ask a question or explain anything to the course instructor, and they find it embarrassing sometimes. They think that the teacher or their classmates get impatient and find it annoying if they take too much time to come up with a question or answer. Thus, they refrain from participating in the class discussion. In their opinion, it is the lack of fluency that makes them suffer the most in the university that follows English as a medium of instruction. They hold the complete absence of speaking skills in their school and college life responsible for this. Even though they had two papers in English (English first and second papers) in the last four years of their previous academic life, they never had the opportunity to interact in English with their teachers; even the English classes were also conducted in Bangla.

Regarding the limitation in vocabulary, one student shared one of his experiences of online classes. Once his teacher asked him a question in one of his online classes, and while answering, he could not remember a word no matter how hard he tried. As a result, the teacher thought that he did not know the complete answer and moved on to a different student. However, he knew the answer quite well, but because of not being able to remember the exact word, he could not complete his answer. According to other students, these occurrences are more common during presentations and viva. As they remain already under a lot of pressure during these assessments, they often go blank and cannot come up with a synonym or explanation of the word because of the limited vocabulary. This is the same reason why they have this inertia about class participation as well.

As for pronunciation, those two students mentioned that they feel shy because of their mispronunciations. They think that their classmates will laugh at them or mock them. They will lose their credibility to the teacher, peers, and assignment or presentation group members. That is why they prefer to keep quiet in class. One of them said, "Even when I know the answer, I don't raise my hand or give the answer unless the teacher specifically asks me to. When the class is over, other students sometimes talk to me using mispronounced words or sounds. Maybe they do it as fun, but I find it offending." Nevertheless, they agreed that their teachers never discriminate against them based on their regional or standard pronunciation; they rather help them come up with the correct pronunciation by making them repeat the same word or sound.

Question e) During your English-speaking course in the first semester, how did you receive feedback/corrections from your course instructor?

While answering this question, four out of seven students said that when they had spoken performances assessed in the class in the speaking course, the course instructors used to give them two minutes to think about the topic. Afterwards, they were asked to talk for two/three minutes on the topic. The teachers listened to them carefully and noted down their mistakes/errors. Later, when everyone was done, the teachers mentioned and explained the common mistakes/errors that were found in their speech. Moreover, she/he also demonstrated again how to say it correctly by repeating his/her instructions and examples and/or playing the intended video/audio for the class. Later, she/he had an open discussion with the students regarding their understanding, confusion, and sometimes also for another round of practice to see if the students can use the correct forms. "This additional or extra session helped us a lot because we got more chances to practice in front of the teacher.", said one of the participants. These students also added that sometimes the audio and/or video were not played at the beginning of the class. Therefore, the students had to rely only on the teachers' instructions/lectures before they started talking or discussing the given topic, and once the class performance session was over, the video and/or audio were played. Nevertheless, the teachers always wrote down the issues the students had in their speaking to give feedback later following the list of 'most common mistakes made by students'.

The other three students had, to some extent, a different experience in terms of receiving feedback and materials from the course instructors. Their teacher had a mixed approach while providing them with the materials required for the class performance activities. According to them, for comparatively more difficult or lengthier topics, the teacher used to upload the materials including the vocabulary list, audio, video, website link etc. on Google Classroom before the class, and they were instructed to go through the materials before attending the next class. Later, the teacher asked the students next class whether they had any problems understanding the topic and clarified if there was any confusion or answered their queries. She also often discussed some extra information/details not covered in the students' queries. The students mentioned that she corrected students' mistakes/errors when they asked her any questions or discussed any points from the previously uploaded topics. Afterwards, they were given a task for the class performance activity. The teacher again corrected them during their speech after finishing the task. She used to ask questions, give them feedback, and correct their mistakes/errors individually and simultaneously. One of them mentioned, " The thing that I admired the most about ma'am is she was very patient while dealing with our mistakes and issues."

Question f) Was the process of receiving feedback/correction helpful? If yes, how? If not, why?

The students who got feedback altogether at the end of everyone's performances think that it was helpful for them to get the corrections. However, among those four students, three of them think that if they received the feedback individually right after each student's performance, it would have been easier for them to understand which mistakes/errors were made by them. In their opinion, it could help them find out their specific problem in speaking, and they could easily focus on overcoming those limitations. However, as they got overall feedback that incorporated mistakes/errors done by everyone, it was difficult for them to point it out. Moreover, one of the students added that because of being in the first semester, sometimes it was confusing for them to differentiate among various types of corrections. For example, one of the students said, "When my teacher explained that our major problems were in tense and subject-verb agreement, I got really confused. It is because I'm very weak in English speaking, and I didn't understand if I had problems only in agreement or tense or in both. The concept was not clear to me." On the contrary, the other students supported this idea of providing feedback for all the students together at the same time. To him, it would have

been embarrassing for him if the teacher singled out his mistakes/errors and corrected him personally in front of the whole class. For this system of feedback, no one else could know about other's weaknesses, and the student could identify his own limitations from the list of corrections provided by the teacher.

For the rest of the students, they appreciated the technique of giving individual feedback by the teacher. These three students completed the course under the same instructor in different sections, and they all had the same approach of receiving the corrections from the teacher. They liked it because it helped them find out their exact shortcomings. Furthermore, they enjoyed the scope of their thorough participation in every step of the lesson. According to them, as the teacher often started the class by telling them to ask her questions and share their opinions before she started her formal lecture, students found it more interactive. They think that it allowed them to share their perspective of whether they liked or disliked the topic and why. As one of them stated, "It was more of an open discussion. We knew that our participation was going to be evaluated, but as it was done less formally, students were more interested in participating. It was not like as if were being forced to participate. We like it when we can talk about our likes and dislikes." One student mentioned that as the teacher corrected them instantly and gave some examples of correct use of words, pronunciation, and sentence structure, it was more convenient for them to retain the corrections for a longer time. In addition, according to them, as they came to know about their individual limitations, it helped them to correct themselves later when they made the same mistakes, and this ability of self-assessment made them more confident in speaking in English.

4.2 FGD analysis:

From the first question, it is clear that usually, students do not have much interest in practicing on their own or with peers outside of the classroom. Only one student does that, but for others, they do not find enough motivation to do so because for their current courses, it is not obligatory for them to use English in the class. However, they used to do it while doing the speaking course in their first semester as they were motivated by the teacher, and they had to use English in the class discussion. As English is not their first language, and they did not get proper exposure to the speaking of English in their previous academic life, it is more convenient for them to use Bangla. Moreover, it requires an environment that makes them keep using as well as practicing English, and when such an environment is not there in their classroom, they eventually stop trying to improve their speaking skills. Therefore, we can see that the lack of mediation and interaction can have a negative impact. Daneshfar and Moharami (2018) and Alshammari (2022) also shared a similar view regarding this matter discussing that it is necessary to present them with proper exposure to social, cultural, and interpersonal experiences which can also assist them in the development of their cognitive ability. Moreover, Poehner in 2007 talked about how mediation can have a significant role in helping students to go beyond their existing proficiency in terms of both language and cognition.

If the second and third questions are analyzed, it is quite clear that all the students appreciate and think that different people can help them develop their proficiency level in speaking in English by receiving feedback. However, it can be noticed that the people they are comfortable getting feedback from vary from one student to another. They have their reasons behind it too. For example, some of them think receiving feedback from their family members is more effective because they can practice with them at their convenience, and there is less inhibition while practicing with their own people. On the contrary, the students who think it is their friends, peers, or seniors, believe that these people know the requirements well because they belong to the same academic settings. Nevertheless, there is no confusion that all the corrections and feedback received from the people who have a better understanding and proficiency than them can be of great use to them in overcoming their limitations in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary etc. According to Verity (2005), ZPD also refers to the same idea that how learners' performance can be significantly different in a given task when they work collaboratively with a more capable person. Without getting engaged in an active conversation with others, their performance level remains static. Daneshfar and Moharami (2018) have also opined that stimuli received from the environment cannot function on their own unless they are facilitated by a mediator whose linguistic capacity is more advanced than the learner. In the same manner, two of the participants from the FGD mentioned how their elder brother and sister who are a corporate employee and a university graduate respectively helped them with their correct pronunciation, proper use of gestures, preparation of PowerPoint slides etc., for a presentation; another participant added that her younger sister being an English-medium student helps her with enriching her vocabulary. In addition to that, one of the students who received feedback from his university mates stated that they helped him correct his wrong pronunciations.

As for the fourth question, lack of fluency seems to be the common incapacity found among all the participants. In addition to fluency, issues with vocabulary and pronunciation can also be found. This creates hindrances for them to actively participate in the class discussion out of inhibition, shyness, and embarrassment. Even if the teacher in the class does not bother about students taking more time because of their lack of fluency, vocabulary, or correct pronunciation, there is always peer pressure that keeps the students away from participation. As it takes them a long time to respond or explain their answers, they sometimes refrain from answering questions even when they know the answers. Moreover, mispronunciation indicates their regional dialect which can be a cause of their discomfiture, and their peers may make fun of them for that. Students have mentioned that the

complete absence of speaking skills in their twelve years of school and college (classes 11 and 12 are considered college in the Bangladeshi context) life is responsible for their limitations. All the participants are from Bangla medium, and in Bangladesh, there is hardly any practice of listening and speaking skills in such schools, not even in the English language classes. Only reading and writing get the utmost emphasis; as a result, though these students from Bangla medium do well in their writing and reading activities when they reach the tertiary-level institution, it is the speaking and listening skills that they experience the most difficulties with. Therefore, after studying the English language for twelve years, they cannot communicate properly using English by the time they start their university life where English medium instruction is followed. In the worst case possible, these students may not be able to overcome their inhibitions in the next four years of their university life unless they get proper exposure as well as motivation to keep using English. In this regard, we can consider the article of Fahmi, Pratolo, and Zahruni (2020). They also shared a similar scenario found in their study of Indonesian ESL/EFL students. According to them, their students cannot speak English properly when they turn seventeen years old, and sometimes they have been learning the language for over six years. Moreover, third or fourth-semester students of a university find it difficult to use English for speaking. To make things worse, when their speaking is assessed traditionally, it multiplies their fear and inhibition which in turn makes it impossible for them to overcome the limitations.

Now, if the fifth and sixth questions from the FGD are considered, two contrasting perspectives on the process of receiving feedback and how it helped the students can be seen. In the first scenario, students received overall feedback at the end of their class performance, and the teacher noted down their mistakes/errors during their speech. In this case, except for one student, the participants think that if they received individual feedback instead of a generalized one that talks about every student's mistakes/errors, it would been more beneficial to them to understand their individual lacking. However, the second scenario has a more interactive environment because the teacher gave feedback to each student during their class performance. They did not have to wait till everyone's performance was over, and also it was not meant for holistic feedback, but rather a discrete one. Moreover, as the students had a chance to share their ideas and opinions before the teacher's lecture based on the materials assigned to them, they had more scope to have a meaningful interaction with the teacher. It made them feel more autonomous and responsible for their learning. These two scenarios can be compared with two different types of dynamic assessment: interactionist and interventionist dynamic assessments. If not strictly, the first scenario can be loosely compared with the interventionist approach of dynamic assessment. There is already a predesigned list of errors/mistakes that can be made by the students, and the teacher follows the list to correct their feedback. As Lantolf and Poehner (2011) pointed out, in this type of DA, the mediation is pre-planned, implicit, and explicit, in the form of hints, prompts, and leading questions. These hints and prompts are provided one after another to help students come up with the correct answer. However, sandwich and cake formats cannot be found in their class performance assessment. In contrast, the second scenario is more mediated than the first one because it is more dialogic. There was no pre-designed list, hints, or prompts used by the teacher; the whole assessment was done while interacting with the students individually. As Lantolf and Poehner (2011) stated that, it does not have any pre-designed cues, questions, hints or help. In this type of DA, the mediation is the outcome of the interlocution between the teacher and learner in the form of dialogues. Also, the mediation is changed constantly based on learners' needs instead of following a list and without restricting the mediation. Also, Poehner in 2005 said that abandoning the examinee-examiner relationship by supporting a tutor-student relationship in assessment with the help of dialogic communication between the student and the teacher, interactionist DA goes along with Vygotsky's preference for cooperative dialoguing in assessment.

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be said that the notions of Vygotsky's ZPD in association with mediation assisted Bangladeshi tertiary-level learners in improving different components of their speaking skills. Moreover, the practice of DA, more specifically interactionist one, had a profound impact on learners for their successful reception and processing of the feedback that later helped them with self-assessment. It can be seen in the research that ZPD and mediation corresponded with DA in the classroom, which helped them overcome their reluctance to speak; however, ZPD and mediation played their roles outside of the classroom as well. For example, it was not only the participants' course instructors but also their siblings, seniors, and club-mates who made significant contributions in improving their vocabulary, sharpening their presentation skills, or correcting their pronunciation. Therefore, it is both the social and academic mediations in the form of meaningful interactions within ZPD that are necessary for the development of their oral communication skills.

The result showed that interactionist DA was more beneficial for the participants to find out their specific limitations and work on them. It later made them self-aware of their mistakes and enabled them to self-assess themselves. As for this type of DA, the assessment was done individually and they got multiple opportunities to share their opinions and receive feedback before the final assessed performance, it built up their confidence to self-regulate their spoken performances. Indeed, all the mentioned course instructors of the "Improving Oral Communication Skills" course tried to have a practice session in different formats followed by demonstrating the correct uses of expressions, providing feedback, and finally the graded activity. However, due to the time constraints (90 minutes of class time) and unfavourable number of students (30-35 students) in the course, it was not always possible to recreate the exact format of DA. Nevertheless, students certainly benefit from DA more than traditional assessment,

and they knowingly or unknowingly practised the notions of mediation and ZPD with different people. They are ready to accept DA for their betterment of oral proficiency skills, and this is what the current research wanted to find out with student-only research with FGD that delved into the perceptions of Bangladeshi tertiary-level students.

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