



International Conference on Current Trends in ELT

On the Study of DA and SLA: Feuerstein's MLE and EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension

Jila Naeini*

Department of English, Aliabad Katoul Branch, Islamic Azad, University, Aliabad Katoul, Iran.

Abstract

This study attempted to extend the traditional understanding of reading comprehension assessment in foreign language contexts and to apply one of dynamic assessment (DA) approaches, that is, Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience (MLE), to development of Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. To this end, a mixed methods approach was applied. Sixty eight EFL learners at Islamic Azad University were assigned to two groups of experimental and control. The results of the qualitative as well as the aggregate and disaggregated quantitative data analyses indicated that MLE intervention approach of DA was effective and exerted profound impacts on the learners' reading comprehension.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Urmia University, Iran.

Keywords: Assessment, Dynamic assessment, Sociocultural theory, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

1. Introduction

Measuring students' current performance level cannot indeed provide assessors with enough information about the students' potential ability. Referring to Vygotsky (1978) learning potential can be identified and assessed through applying zone of proximal development (ZPD)-the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development under a mediator. With appropriate mediation then through implementing DA procedures, learners can move from their actual level of development toward their potential level of development. Mediators promote learning by choosing and shaping the learners' learning experiences.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: 981736226404; fax: +0-000-000-0000 .

E-mail address: naeini.j@gmail.com

The interactional characteristics of Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) promote learning and offer meaningful assistance in designing DA interactions (Lidz, 2002). For Feuerstein (2000) a mediator is different from a teacher: the mediator provides a suitable stimulus (e.g., homework, test, or assignment) and then observes the response of the learner to the stimulus. Based on the response, the teacher interacts with the learner (e.g., praise, criticism, encouragement, grade, and new assignment) and the process is continued until either the teacher or the learner is satisfied or time runs out (p. 558). In fact, the mediator in MLE facilitates the learner's internalization. In this way, the learner's social interaction with the mediator provides a model to help developing beyond the learner's current capabilities. Therefore, MLE is the heart of DA and as Poehner (2005) pin points, in the intensive MLE (intensive because the assessor provides as much mediation and as many forms of mediation as possible) the adult mediator during the assessment procedures involves in a task with a learner aiming at diagnosing the learner's potential for cognitive change.

According to the results of so many studies (e.g. Alyusef, 2005; McKeown, Beck, Black, 2009; Xie, 2010) EFL students suffer merely from a multitude overlooked difficulties in reading comprehension. In order to tackle EFL learners' reading comprehension problems, diagnostic assessments such as DA in which qualitative reading research examines the process of reading comprehension is influential. In other words, unification of assessment and instruction in DA procedures are used as diagnostic evaluations. Therefore, this study intended to address the EFL learners' reading comprehension problems applying Feuerstein's MLE in DA. In addition, the present study first attempted to diagnose EFL learners' reading comprehension problems and then tried to remove those problems applying DA procedures.

2. The Study

2.1 Participants

The students participating in various stages of this study were the undergraduates majoring in diverse fields at Islamic Azad University, Aliabad Katoul Branch (AKIAU). Sixty eight EFL students who were taking a GE course at the time of the research drawn from an initial pool of 90 in six intact classes participated in the study. Twenty two of the students did not take part in all stages of the project; therefore, they were excluded from the list of the participants. The result of a one-way ANOVA ($F(1, 67) = 1.32, P = .23 < .05$) indicated that the participants did not show any statistically significant difference in their performance on the reading section of the Key English Test (KET, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2005).

2.2 Instruments

In this study four assessment instruments (to assess the learners' reading comprehension at different stages of the current study) and 2 mediational instruments were also used.

2.2.1 Assessment instruments

Two assessment instruments were developed and applied for the current study.

2.2.1.1 The Reading KET

In order to assess the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their general English reading comprehension, the reading section of the Key English Test (KET) which was developed and standardized by University of Cambridge ESOL Examination (UCLES), was used.

2.2.1.2 Reading comprehension tests

Three valid and reliable reading comprehension tests were used to estimate the participants' reading comprehension at different stages of the study. The tests were developed by the researcher and were piloted and modified at the pilot study procedure prior to the main study procedure. Each test consisted of four passages and each passage was followed by six reading comprehension questions. The reading comprehension questions were focused on three reading comprehension domains: (1) Finding the main idea, (2) Guessing the meaning of the new

words, (3) inferencing; therefore, the reading comprehension questions are, henceforth, referred to as Main idea Questions (MQs), Guessing Questions (GQs), and Inferencing Questions (IQs), respectively.

2.2.2 Mediational instrument

The mediational instruments for the MLEG were designed by the researcher, piloted, and revised. The mediational materials for the intervention program comprised of a reading comprehension test (the pretest) and a specific mediational taxonomy for the intervention program: The MLET (Table 1). The intervention program was based on Feuerstein’s MLE. Therefore, the mediation typology was not generated a priori but instead the MLET was produced as the result of the close analysis of the mediator’s cooperative dialogues with each of the learners in every session. In this way, the MLET was developed in a manner parallel to the Regulatory Scale reported in Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994). Following Aljaafreh and Lantolf, the MLET (Table 1) was not meant to be exhaustive and to be prescriptive. In fact, in line with Poehner (2005), the MLET only described the mediator-learner interactions in the present study but should not be viewed as rules. Generally, one of the specific features of the interactionist (MLE) DA, according to Feuerstein, Rand and Rynders (1988, cited in Poehner, 2005) is proving the flexible grounds in which the learner development can be best enhanced. Producing the mediational taxonomy provided the researcher with a criterion for comparing and analyzing the quality and the frequency of the mediations delivered and used by the learners during the MLE intervention program.

Table 1. Taxonomy of Mediations for MLE Intervention Program (MLET)

Reading Comprehension Domains	Mediation Typology
MQMs	Exploring the student’s self-strategy Finding the most frequent word /phrase Finding the topic Finding the idea of all the paragraphs Using the information in the first paragraph Using the information in the last paragraph Asking for an explanation
GQMs	Exploring the student’s self-strategy Analyzing the word for the suffix or prefix Checking the meaning of the options Checking the meaning of the sentence including the option Asking for an explanation
IQMs	Exploring the student’s self-strategy Paraphrasing the question Considering the prior knowledge Summarizing Monitoring discourse structures (comparing, contrasting, describing,...) Finding the interrelationships using logical connectors Checking the previous understanding Asking for an explanation

*MQMs: Main idea Questions Mediations, GQMs: Guessing Questions Mediations, and IQMs: Inferencing Questions Mediations,

Regarding the materials used during the MLE intervention programs (i.e. the reading comprehension pretest), the mediational typology was designed to mediate three types of the reading comprehension questions included in the pretest. Therefore, the mediations for each reading comprehension domain during the MLE intervention program are of the following types: Finding the main idea (Main idea Questions Mediations, MQMs), Guessing the meaning of the new words (Guessing Questions Mediations, GQMs), and Inferencing (Inferencing Questions Mediations, IQMs). A pilot study preceded the main study to investigate the adequacy of the instruments used in the study. It was also intended to gather a valid repertoire of the mediational taxonomies for the intervention programs.

2.3 Procedures for developing the MLET

Feuerstein and Feuerstein (1999) define MLE as “a quality of interaction between the organism and its environment” (p. 7). They concede that the quality of the MLE interaction is best described by a series of twelve parameters. These 12 parameters created the foundation for developing the MLET. The MLET was generated

through the close analysis of the mediator's cooperative dialogues with each of the learners in every session during the pilot study. All the dialogues were audiotaped for the grounded analysis. The data were collected and they were then content analysed. In order to produce MLET, the transcriptions of mediations were examined to see whether they were in accordance with Feuerstein and Feuerstein's (1999) MLE critical and reinforcing parameters. Therefore, the data collected during the pilot MLE sessions were underwent careful qualitative grounded analyses to check whether the MLE assumptions were observed. Three critical parameters of MLE, that is, intentionality and reciprocity, transcendence, and mediation of meaning, were applied to shape the interactions during the MLE sessions. Intentionality and reciprocity are the main conditions of an MLE interaction. Finally, four critical considerations (represented in Figure 1) were taken in order to develop and implement MLET.

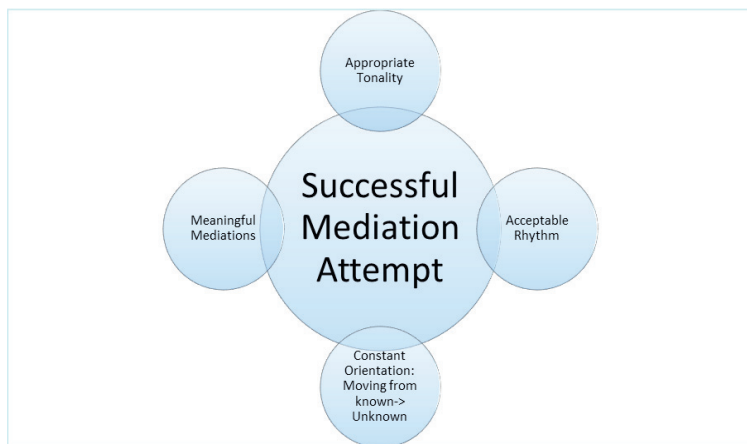


Figure 1. Critical Considerations for an MLE Intervention Session.

2.4 Main study procedure

In Week 1, the students were briefed about the whole project. Then, they were given a table of time sheet to select the appropriate sessions for the mediations sessions. In Week 2, the Reading KET was administered. It took about 45 minutes. The test results were used to determine the homogeneity of the participants in terms of their general reading comprehension. In Week 3, all the participants took the reading comprehension pretest. In Week 4, person-to-person semi-structured interviews were conducted with the MLEG. The intervention program started in Week 5 and continued onto Week 6 and 7. The posttest was conducted in Week 8 to examine the impact of the interventions provided during the MLE intervention program on the reading comprehension of the MLEG. The CG also took the posttest. The posttest was conducted during the learners' regular class hours and the administration took approximately 35 minutes. The transfer test was conducted in Week 9 to explore whether the learners were able to use their acquired knowledge (during the intervention programs) in a novel context. The transfer test was administered in individualized format. In other words, the transfer test was administered in private sessions in order to have close examination of learners' progress. The detailed description of each intervention session during the MLE intervention program is described as follows.

Session 1: The learner was presented with the first passage (of the pretest). The learner was asked to read and think aloud so that the researcher could explore the strategies she applied to answer the question. Although the mediation typology (the MLET presented in Table 1) posits a hierarchy of the mediations for the MLE intervention program, the application of the mediations presented in the MLET is not prescriptive. In particular, in order to promote learning, Vygotsky's conceptualization of ZPD was used. Besides, in order to explore the learner's self-strategy, once the student selected the correct answer, the researcher asked the learner to explain the reason for choosing that specific option. In turn, once the student did not use a suitable strategy to come up with the correct

answer, the researcher intervened and provided her with the detailed explanations about this type of reading comprehension questions and the suitable strategies. Having being ascertained that the learner learned how to find the main idea of the passage, the researcher presented the second passage and asked the learner to answer the next main idea question. There was an attempt to track the change in the learner's method of finding the answers. This is the Feuerstein and Feuerstein's (1999) tenth MLE parameter. The learner's incorrect answers were mediated regarding all MLE's critical parameters prepared and developed by the researcher. Once the student chose a wrong answer; the researcher attempted to explore the reason and provided the learner with whatever assistance that could improve the learner's reading ability. The student's correct answers were also discussed for exploring the probable creative ways the learner applied to reach the correct answer. This is Feuerstein and Feuerstein's (1999) third reinforcing MLE parameter. The intervention Session 1 would end after addressing all main idea questions of the pretest.

Session 2. The student was asked to read the first question (a guessing question). The student was initially asked to check whether she knew the meaning of the word. If the learner did not know the meaning, she was then asked to find the answer. In order to explore the student's self-strategy in finding the meaning of the new words, she was not given any hints at her first attempt. If she selected the wrong answer, the researcher began to provide her with suitable MLE mediations. The researcher at first explained that different types of strategies would be used for each word. However, it was important in the first place to analyze the word. In other words, the word had to be detected for the inclusion of any affixes. During all of intervention sessions, there was an attempt to engage learners with discussions. Drawing on Feuerstein and Feuerstein's (1999) critical parameter of intentionality and reciprocity, learners' effective involvement during the MLE intervention sessions was sought.

Session 3. According to Grabe (2009), inferencing is one of the fundamental cognitive mechanisms that connect what we are currently attempting to understand. He emphasizes that academic inferencing, which is a demanding skill, "requires the evaluation of many different linguistic cues and the recognition of sometimes subtle textual cues" (p. 70). Apparently, Session 3 took much longer than the previous sessions. First, the student was given the information about this type of questions. The student then was presented with the first passage. She was asked to read Passage 1 and answer the first IQ. The student was given enough time to read the passage and answer the question. After exploring the learner's self-strategy, the researcher provided the learner with appropriate mediations. Regarding the nature of the IQs, it was important to distinguish what type of the IQ the inferencing question it was and which strategies were then due. As there were 12 IQs, the third session lasted approximately 70-90 minutes. Session 3 would stop once the learner answered or received the mediations for all 12 IQs.

3. Data Analysis and the Results

The results of the quantitative data analyses are reported into two sections of (1) aggregate quantitative data analyses, and (2) disaggregated quantitative data analyses.

3.1 Aggregated Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics of the posttest and the transfer test indicate that the mean of the MLEG ($M = 13.97$, $SD = 4.07$) in the posttest and in turn in the transfer test ($M = 15.23$, $SD = 3.62$) are exponentially higher than those of the CG ($M = 8.44$, $SD = 3.06$, $M = 7.00$, $SD = 2.93$ for the posttest and the transfer test respectively). Furthermore, the $t(66) = 6.32$, $p = .00$ (two-tailed) lead to the conclusion that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups in the posttest. The results of the transfer test $F(1, 66) = .70$, $p = .41$ for the equality of the variances and $t(67) = 10.72$, $p = .00$ (two-tailed) also confirmed that the mean differences of 8.23 is significant. For the brevity, the tables of the aggregate data analysis which was based on the participants' independent reading comprehension approached by means of descriptive and inferential statistical measures are not reported in this paper. Mainly, disaggregated data analysis examines the raw counts of the learners' responses produced for each single domain of reading comprehension to provide deeper insight into the learners' moves.

3.1 Disaggregated Quantitative Data Analysis

The reading comprehension tests aimed at testing only three domains of reading comprehension. Therefore, reading comprehension questions were included three subsections of the MQs, the GQs, and the IQs. Table 2 represents the scores of the MLEG (N = 34, From S35 – S68) in three reading comprehension tests (For brevity, the Table was shortened and only some of the students' scores in MLEG are presented in Table 2). In the table, the learners were referred to by numbers rather than their names. Therefore, for data analysis the learners were called by their numbers in the list. The 24 item reading tests consist of four MQs, eight GQs, and twelve IQs. The scores recorded in each cell indicate the number of the correct responses for each item. Table 2 shows dramatic improvement of S35 in the GQs in the posttest and the transfer test: 4 → 6 in the posttest and 6 → 8 in the transfer test. By comparing the students' scores and their performance in each domain of reading comprehension tested by three reading tests, the students' improvement in the posttest and, in turn, in the transfer test is quite evident.

Student 45's marked improvement in the MQs is shown in the Table (0→4→4). She scored 0 in the pretest indicating that she could not answer any of the MQs. Though, she answered all four MQs in the posttest correctly. More importantly, S45 could transfer the acquired knowledge onto novel test of the transfer test and she also scored four in the transfer test. Her scores in the GQs and the IQs also uncovered her dramatic progress: 2→5→5 and 4→8→8 in posttest and transfer test, respectively. In addition, S47 also showed marked improvement in the IQs: 4 →7→10.

Table 2. The MLEG's Scores in all Three Reading Comprehension Domains in the Pretest, the Posttest and the Transfer test

Sn	MQs			GQs			IQs		
	Pretest Total=4	Posttest Total=4	Transfer Test Total=4	pretest Total=8	Posttest Total=8	Transfer Test Total=8	Pretest Total=12	Posttest Total=12	Transfer Test Total=12
35	2	3	3	4	6	8	6	7	7
45	0	4	4	2	5	5	4	8	8
47	0	4	4	1	6	7	5	9	10
50	1	3	3	4	5	7	2	7	5
51	1	4	4	2	4	6	4	8	8
52	1	3	3	3	5	7	4	2	7
53	3	4	4	3	4	6	2	9	9
54	1	3	3	5	5	8	3	8	5
55	2	2	2	3	4	7	4	7	10
56	1	4	3	3	4	6	5	2	7
57	1	4	4	4	4	3	4	2	4
58	2	2	4	3	5	4	5	7	7
59	1	4	4	4	6	7	5	10	9
60	2	2	3	3	4	6	7	9	11
61	1	4	4	5	6	8	4	8	8
62	1	2	4	5	7	7	5	7	7
63	2	3	3	2	6	8	7	10	9
64	0	2	3	2	4	6	2	3	3
65	2	4	4	5	7	7	7	7	8

*Sn: The student's number, MQs: Main Idea Questions, GQs: Guessing the meaning of the new words Questions, IQs: Inferencing Questions.

3.2 The qualitative data analysis

It should be noted that the qualitative analysis of the learners' performances for the MLE intervention program is carried out through merely reporting the interactions between the learners and the mediator (researcher) in each session. In other words, since for each of three reading comprehension domain only one intervention session was carried out, no comparisons are made on the learners' performances during the intervention program. The reports are then provided to present the effect of each mediational attempt in firstly diagnosing the mediatee's (learner's) problem in reading comprehension and secondly moving the learner toward success in doing reading comprehension assessments while offering appropriate assistance.

Actually, the purpose of the qualitative data analysis is reporting the learners' process of reading comprehension development (grounded in Vygotsky's writings on the relationship between ZPD assessment and development), in contrast to the quantitative data analyses which aimed at analyzing the product of the reading comprehension which had been manifested in the assessment results. Firstly, the cases in which individuals' abilities did not develop to the

point where they no longer needed mediation, but rather reciprocated at a higher level when mediation was offered are reported. The second section concerns the conceptual changes that occurred in learners' understanding of reading comprehension domains through interacting with the mediator, and the effects this has on their performance. Finally, the issue of transcendence is addressed.

Mediation failure in learner development: Regarding the first reading comprehension domain, that is finding the main idea of the passage, S55's performances did not manifest improvement (Table 2). S55 struggled with finding the main idea aspect of reading comprehension during the first intervention program. It is important not to judge her ability on the basis of the product of her performance in the posttest as we would miss the development that occurred. Therefore, it is of great value to regard the kind of mediation she required, as well as her reciprocity because although she commits errors in both instances, these errors do not have the same psychological status. In the following excerpt, S55 was struggling to find the correct response to Question 1 (The passage is primarily about...): (Note: In the following exchanges S stands for student, the index number is the number of the student in the researcher's list, and R stands for the researcher. The dialogues were in the learners' native language, Persian, then they were transcribed and translated into English.)

Exchange 1

S55: 1. I think (a)

R: 2. "How and why did you choose (a)?"

S55: 3. I read the text. Here, it is written "writing". I think it is the answer.

R: 4. you find this word in the text "writing", ...is it the most

R: 5. ..frequent word, what is the topic of the passage?

S55: 6. of course, ..not writingbut success yes, .. the text is about

S55: 7. ... "success"

R: 8. So, you still think the passage is mainly about "writing your goals"?

S55: 9. No, ... "making mistakes"? I mean ...it is .."b" ..

R: 10. Do you have this , ..i mean "making mistakes" in all paragraphs?

S55: 11. ..no. but in paragraph "b" only,so you mean that the main

S55: 12. idea is said in other paragraphs too?

R: 13. Yes ,the main idea is referred to usually in all paragraphs

S55: 14. ..you mean that "d" is not thebecause "fear" is not only

S55: 15. ..in Paragraph 2... only ... "c" is left.....then

R: 16. That is right ..it is

Lines 12 and 15 showed that the researcher's third intervention resulted in a successful change in the learner's performance. More importantly the second intervention called the learner's attention to the fact that the main idea of the passage was not usually referred to in only one or two paragraphs (Line 12). As the utterances indicate, the researcher had not explicitly stated the point. Therefore, it can be concluded that without this interaction it would have been difficult to discover that the learner had some control over the use of some strategies in doing reading tests, which had not been available to the learner before the mediations were provided.

This is referred to as a co-constructed ZPD (Ash & Levitt, 2003) because of ongoing and changing interpretation of the mediator and the mediatee's ideas participatory appropriation was applied. In fact, participatory appropriation is "the mutual constitution of personal, interpersonal and cultural processes" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 156). Thus, exchange 1 reveals that both the mediator and the mediatee appropriate cognitive products and they both involve in joint productive activity while developing shared attention and meanings, and taking another's product for one's own use.

Furthermore, S55's improvement was observed over the next attempt to find the main idea of the passage. In the following extract S55 was asked to answer Question 7 (What is the passage mainly about?):

Exchange 2

S55: 17. ..it's clear ..the passage is about "depression: ...but main idea ...

S55: 18. ...different kind of depression?...

R:19. If the passage is about any kinds of depression, tell me how many

R: 20... kinds you found?

S55: 21. No ...any kinds.....but ..it is not generally about treating...

S55: 22.and “symptom” is not in other paragraphsso yes “a”

Lines 21 and 22 uncover what she acquired in the previous exchange was available and assisted her in finding the correct answer. As it is evident in Exchange 2, S55 mistakenly concluded that the passage was about kinds of depression (Line 18) but the mediator drew her attention to the point which was appropriately guided and prompted her to remember what she had learned in her previous attempt of finding the main idea.

Conceptual changes in understanding over time: During the MLE interventions, it was observed that development could manifest itself in learners’ conceptualizations. Therefore, tracing the changes in learners’ understanding of semantic consequences of choosing one option over the other was given attention. In some instances, learners were not able to justify why they had selected one specific option over the other options. However, during the MLE intervention sessions they manifested improvement. These insights were gained in some cases through the comments the learners made as they were thinking aloud, and in other cases when the researcher intervened to pursue the learners’ explanation for their choices. An excellent illustration of this kind of change over time is found in S47’s remarks as she was striving for IQs. The following excerpts were taken from S47’s first and third intervention sessions. In the following excerpt S47 was asked to answer Question 6 (It can be inferred from Paragraph 4 that.....):

Exchange 3

S47: 23. ... (c)..

R: 24. Can you tell me why you have chosen (c)?

S47: 25. ...I don’t know why? But I think the answer is (c)..

Line 24 shows the researcher’s first attempt in providing the learner with mediations. The learner’s self-strategy was explored at the initial stages in all intervention sessions. In Line 25, the learner expressed that she did not have any reason for her correct choice. However, S47’s conceptualization changed during the interventions. The following excerpt illustrates how appropriately she was able to offer a reasoned explanation for her choice that uncovered the signs of a more conceptual understanding. The following excerpt presents S47’s struggle with Question 15 (It can be inferred from the passage that Luther King):

Exchange 4

S47: 26. I think “b”

R: 27. Why do you think Luther King did not believe in force....?

S47: 28. Becauseit is here....his belief in no war....as you said in

S47: 29. ...this line...never changed....and for

R: 30. Can you find a kind of relationship between option (a) and (b)?

S47: 31. ... option (a) and option (b) are opposites.....

The utterances in Line 28 and Line 29 manifest that the learner was able to justify her choice and she acquired the ability of conceptualization during the interventions. As Line 30 shows, the researcher intervened and directed the learner’s attention to the aspects in reading comprehension which had already been ignored. What was specific to S47 was that she was able to make a rapid gain following a discussion of any points with the mediator. Her improvement was quantitatively manifested on her scores in the posttest particularly in IQs (Table 2). Therefore, careful mediation prepares the students, by drawing their attention to the key processes and ideas, before engaging them in interactive tasks. This, according to Walqui (2006), leads to a natural growth in the understanding of ideas and to self-correction of misunderstandings. In addition, as Walqui pin points this kind of reciprocal activities especially in language classes enables teachers to see that the students are successfully engaged in all steps of the process.

Transferring learning beyond the intervention: Feuerstein (2000) believes that transcendence is what learning should be about. He argues that transfer is bridging between the experience and lessons learned in the current situation and new situations. Poehner (2005) clarifies the concept “development can manifest itself in a variety of ways, and this development is after all at the heart of transcendence” (p. 338). Therefore, transcendence is crucial to trace the development because it involves going beyond the test as the learners try to recontextualize their abilities while engaging in new tasks.

The following excerpts illustrate how the teacher-learner interactions during the MLE intervention program promoted development and provided insights into the learners’ functioning. The exchanges reveal that the learner who was initially unable to guess the new word in a passage could extend the knowledge acquired during the interventions with the researcher to the novel context while doing the transfer test. The first excerpt was taken from the interactions between the researcher and S65 in the second intervention session in which the student was asked to answer Question 16 (The word “assassinated” in the last paragraph means.....):

Exchange 5

S65: 32. I don’t knowmay be “called”.....

R: 33. Do you know the meaning of the options?

S65: 34. ...yes “helped”...[komak kardan], “worked”.....[karkardan],..

S65: 35.... called...[namidan]....killed...[koshtan]..

(The learners most frequently used the infinitive forms [komak kardan]; therefore, in transcribing and in turn in translation of the transcriptions, the infinitive forms were used)

R: 36. Does the meaning of the options help you?

S65: 37. ..No..

R:38. Read the sentence in which “assassinated” is used...try to find a

R: 39. ...a wordto help youi mean find a key word.

S65: 40...In 1968,..he was assassinated at 39. Only the night before...

S65: 41... his death, King .., “death”? yes it means [mordan] yes “d”...

Line 40 and Line 41 show that these forms of mediations assisted the learner to find the correct meaning of the word “assassinated”. The following exchange in which S65 was struggling to guess the meaning of the word “approach” in Question 20 (The word “approach” in the first paragraph means.....) demonstrates her progress:

Exchange 6

(At first, she started to check the meaning of the options)

S65: 42.express...I don’t know what it means.....

R: 43. It is similar to the word “say”.

S65: 44...comes nearer [jelo omadan],[rafta]..and goes away also [raftan]

S65: 45. “leave”?

R: 47. ...read the first sentencei mean the sentence prior to this one...

R: 48. .. with approach

S65: 49. Imagine you are.....coming toward you.....yes,... coming to you

S65: 50. ..saying it is coming toward you....so.. “b”

Line 45 shows that at first attempt she had problem with guessing the meaning of the word; but, utterances in Lines 49 and 50 indicate that the researcher’s mediation provoked the correct response. More importantly, she could extend this knowledge to the new context (the transfer test). As it was earlier stated, although the transfer test was static, it was administered in private sessions to provide an opportunity for the researcher to trace the learners’ development.

4. Conclusions

The results of this study support the claims concerning the relevance of the sociocultural methodological principles and pedagogical approaches of DA for L2 pedagogy. The findings of the study also confirmed the feasibility of DA and its integration into the reading comprehension areas in second language acquisition research. In this study, DA was represented within the context of a pedagogical task, rather than during the administration of a formal test. This has direct implications for the classroom assessments. The significance for the classroom assessment is the inclusion of the mediation in DA procedures. Mediation is indeed a key concept in the realization of ZPD. In other words, the representation of the learners' ZPD (their actual and potential development), along with the distance in-between, is truly based on the learners' participation during the mediation stage.

In addition, the qualitative grounded data collected during the MLE intervention sessions revealed that the learners' problems with the reading skill could be explored during the mediations and dialogues with the learners in mediation sessions which were conducted face to face with each individual learner. In fact, the content analysis of the dialogues with the learners showed that they had some control over the use of some strategies in doing reading tests but they could not apply while doing the posttest. It can be concluded that if those learners were provided with more meditational sessions they would perform much better in the posttest. The qualitative data analysis also indicated the co-construction of a constructed ZPD. Moreover, the conceptual changes in the learners' understanding of choosing one option over the other were also revealed following content analysis. In some instances, learners who were not able to justify why they had selected one specific option over the other options during the MLE intervention sessions they manifested improvement. It can be concluded that conscientious and mindful mediation prepares the learners by directing their attention to the fundamental procedures, prior to involving them in interactive tasks.

References

- Aljaafreh, A., & Lantolf, J.P. (1994). Negative feedback as regulation and second language learning in the zone of proximal development. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78 (4), 465-483. doi: 10.1111/j.15404781.1994.tb02064
- Alyousef, H.S. (2005). Teaching reading comprehension to esl/efl learners, *The Reading Matrix*, 5 (2), 143-155.
- Ash, D., & Levitt, K. (2003). Working within the Zone of Proximal Development: Formative assessment as professional development. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 14 (1), 1-27.
- Feuerstein, R. Y. (2000). *Mediated learning experience, instrumental enrichment, and the learning propensity assessment device*. Retrieved on August 2012 from: www.icdl.com/graduate/documents/Chapter22.pdf
- Feuerstein, R., & Feuerstein, S. (1999). Mediated learning experience: A theoretical review. In R. Feuerstein, P. S. Klein, & A. J. Tannenbaum (Eds.), *Mediated learning experience: Theoretical, psychosocial and learning Implications* (pp. 3-55). London: Freund.
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lidz, C. S. (2002). Mediated learning experience (MLE) as a basis for an alternative approach. *School Psychology International*, 23 (1), 68-84. doi: 10.1177/0143034302023001731
- McKeown, M.G, Beck, L.L., Black, R.G.K. (2009). Rethinking reading comprehension instruction: a comparison of instruction for strategies and content approaches, *Reading Research Quarterly* 44 (3), 218-254.
- Poehner, M.E. (2005). *Dynamic assessment of oral proficiency among advanced L2 learners of French* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University
- Rogoff, B. (1995). Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: Participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship. In J. V. Wertsch, P. del Rio, & A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind*, (pp. 139- 164.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Walqui, A. (2006). Scaffolding instruction for English language learners: a conceptual framework. *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 9 (2), 159-181.
- Xie, X. (2010). The influence of schema theory on foreign language reading comprehension, *The English Teacher*, 34 , 67-75.